

LAWS OF LIFE

AFTER THE

MIND OF CHRIST

*JOHN HAMILTON THOM*

SECOND SERIES

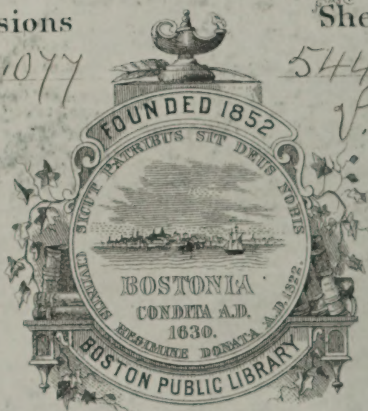
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LAWS OF LIFE  
AFTER THE  
MIND OF CHRIST.

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LAWS OF LIFE

AFTER THE

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LAWS OF LIFE  
AFTER THE  
MIND OF CHRIST.

*The Law of the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus.*—ST. PAUL.

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DISCOURSES

BY

JOHN HAMILTON THOM.

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# ERRATUM.

Page 64, line 6 from bottom, *for* "us" *read* "this."

# LAWS OF LIFE

## AFTER THE MIND OF CHRIST.

### I.

#### The Peace that passeth Understanding.

---

PHILIPPIANS iv. 7 :

“The Peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”

THERE is that which passeth understanding in *all* God's personal relations to us ; but it is in our moments of blessedness, especially of unexpected peace, that the mysterious presence, the divine Causation, is most strongly felt. The Peace of our spirits passeth understanding more than do the Sorrows of Conscience, Flesh, or Heart. In the worst ills and sufferings that befall us we can discern how we are a Law unto ourselves, how they are naturally, constitutionally, or circumstantially derived. We cannot feel that we are a Law unto ourselves in the very least thrill of pure joy, rapture of soul, or assurance of peace, that has possession of us. It is more the living contact of God Himself, less open to our analysis, less



## 2     *The Peace that passeth Understanding.*

the obvious and intelligible product of the conditions in which we are. Even in the highest order of our *Sorrows*, those that come most directly from God, such as the restlessness of our spiritual nature under a sense of imperfection and poverty of being; the uneasy stings of Conscience, not brooking our low estate; the knowledge that we are not what we were intended for, that we are below our calling, even though no conscious sin is present to us; or in that deepest anguish of Bereavement, which is not sorrow for our own desolation, nor any doubt of the blessedness of those who now live with God, but the unappeasable sense of lost opportunity, of a Life of the Heart gone from Earth without having been fully known, of the infinite remorse of tenderness, not mourning the present, but gazing wistfully on a vanished Past from which the richest essence was not drawn whilst yet it was with us;—even in *griefs* like these, which touch the infinite side of our nature, we can understand the inner sources. But of what *Joy*, that is of a high order, can we penetrate to the source, or tell how it comes, of what it is composed, and refer it to the human conditions or surroundings as sufficient to explain it? It is impossible to enumerate the Joys that become a Man, so rich are we in the possibilities of Blessedness; but take their principal Classes: the transfiguring touch of any deep emotion; the uprising of the Heart, the witness in the Soul, when we are in the presence of living Goodness, or have it vividly presented, created in our consciousness by the silent page; the spiritual

influence of Nature, the mediation of Earth and Sky, a mediation lower but as real as that of Christ himself; the Lord God mirrored in its forms and whispering in its sounds; our strange restlessness at the Spring's first breath as of the sap of life rising to new births of the spirit; the deeper meaning of Autumn's look and promise under the glory of decay; the unknown fields of Being to which Meditation opens the gates; the Life of the Affections—the blessedness which comes most freely when least we seek our own; the prophecies of the Heart out of itself, from what it has known and tasted of Goodness, human and divine; our sense of Immortality, most assured from the beauty of holiness, the seal of the imperishable on the face of our dead;—of these, and such as these, what can we say but *that they are*, and that they are of God's great Mercies; and that for any farther knowledge of them it is too wonderful for us,—it is high, and we cannot attain unto it. Our Sorrows, even when most pure, reveal intelligible Sources; but of all worthy Peace the spring is hid in our wondrous connections with Him in whom our life is, in the deep places of our nature where only His Spirit is in contact with our being.

There is of course a vast amount of Peace which *does not pass* our understanding, the circumstance and the condition of which we can fully describe; and they who are satisfied with this, will see no mystery in human Blessedness. The Appetites that are *here* amply provided for need not lead our thoughts to occult Causes, nor to unknown fields of being.

#### 4     *The Peace that passeth Understanding.*

Theirs is the peace of St. Paul's natural man, not necessarily a *carnal* man—there is no occasion to descend so low—but of every part of the man except the *spiritual* man; of the intellectual man, who can live in the most intimate connections with this mysterious Universe, and occupy himself with all its secrets and all its grandeur, and by some strange blindness or security, not discern that the Seen is the symbol of the Unseen, nor feel the awful depths on which he is floating for a moment an entranced spectator; of warm-hearted men, whose dearest part of Life is in human Love, but with whom, through some fatality of constitution, or of unreflecting habit, the daily hunger of the Heart never divinely fortifies the Heart, nor opens the eyes of the Spirit. Yes, it cannot be denied, there *are* men of great intellects, of noble hearts, whose pursuits are all high, whose affections are all pure, who yet, in their loftier and larger sphere, have no surer Peace than the peace of the Child upon the lap of Nature, blessed up to the fulness of faculty with her freshness and variety, her inexhaustible wonders, her sunshine, her freedom, and her flowers,—with no desires unmet—the kind of Peace ascribed to Adam in Eden before the consciousness of a diviner life, the conflict with a higher Will, arose within him, and broke for ever the unspiritual dream.

Yet any measure of inward insight must, it would seem, disclose how unsatisfying all that Peace is which does not pass our Understanding, the sources of which we are able to unfold; for the source is no deeper than its circumstance, earthly provision and



sentient faculty. The noblest tributaries to our spiritual life, intellectual delight and human love, would surely not of themselves veil from the sight of any deep-hearted man the end that awaits them, nor give the feeling that a few years of high thinking and pure loving, under hourly liability to a Death that closed everything, was a life to be content with. If we had no spiritual life that made us partakers in the Life of God, but only Love and Intellect, yet Love and Intellect would surely shrink from such a being; and it is difficult to understand how it is that men with tender and sacred Hearts, who live in converse with Truth and Beauty, with Art and Science ideal in their sphere, with all that is suggestive in affection, with all that is unlimited in refinement and grace and the hunger for more, are not drawn on by the life they have out of this outer court into the Holy of Holies, and do not hear what so many who are vastly their inferiors in mental range, often in nobleness of living, are permitted to hear—the invitations of the Father of Spirits, offering Himself, His own perfections, to His children with an inexhaustible pursuit for Mind, Heart, Soul, and Strength in the outer and inner sphere of their calling. Yet the fact that this is so, without in the least diminishing our own faith—for as the Father hath given to us, so we hear and so we speak—should make us very humble; for among those who it would seem *cannot* believe, there are men who are enthusiasts for Truth, who seek it and sacrifice everything to it more earnestly than most of us seek God, whose whole life is lofty

## 6    *The Peace that passeth Understanding.*

and ideal, who are farther from self-sufficiency than anchorites, and as free from selfishness as Saints. However we may account for this—and we cannot account for it on grounds of personal merits or demerits—the fact remains, that any Peace which is as a House upon a Rock, to which the Soul can flee as the Bird to its Mountain, is from the Spirit who bloweth where He listeth, and passeth understanding. Intellect, Genius, the splendours of Imagination, mighty as they are, and capable of serving its glory, belong themselves to a lower sphere of being, and cannot confer it. The world will not give it, and will not take it away. It is not born of Circumstance: its only relation to Circumstance is in this, that it appears at its height in circumstances that would seem fitted to destroy it. The Peace of Trust—it could not exist if God never veiled His face. The Peace of Conscience—has it not to be born anew day by day of fresh aspiration and penitence? Is not humiliation its nurse and effort its instrument?—for no Habit, whatever be its height, will satisfy the ever-growing demands of, and for, God; and he who is without conflict knows it not at all. The Peace of Love—how else is *that* possible to beings who have sacred hearts and are crushed before the moth—who, because of their sacredness of Heart, cannot live the life of nature, enjoy while they may, and perish when they must?

But while the Peace is of God, there is with Man a preparation of the Heart: and the conditions *in us* most favourable to receptiveness would seem to be—

that all our *Thoughts* of God should be true to His fatherly character, and that our lives should not disturb the perceptions of our souls; that we know Him as He is, and not alienate *ourselves*, by lowering, defiling, or dishonouring the spiritual Life in us to which He communicates His Spirit. We are but recipients, and the vessels of our Peace are our susceptibilities of God. To him that hath is given. In our best estate we are but mirrors of God, and if the mirror is soiled God is not seen. In proportion as we are pure, the promptings in us of the Holy Spirit are quickly felt. In proportion as we are merciful, no suggestion from the Spirit of Mercy is unheard or discarded. In proportion as we are trustful, can God give more to Faith than He ever takes from Sight. Light in the face of the Heavenly Father with whom we have to do, and that faithfulness to the light we have which enables the Father of Light to give us *more* light,—these are the two aptitudes, the two factors, of the spiritual growth and Blessedness of Man.

And these conditions of the Peace of God are not always found together: for though it is true that we never fully know Him until we love Him, and that we never fully love Him until we do His Will, yet there are ways of misconceiving God, of evilly, erroneously—I do not mean sinfully—contemplating His character, His methods, and His purposes, that make sad the hearts of the righteous; and as an unfaithful life will take the fellowship of His peace from a soul that thinks of Him most exaltedly, an *unjust* thought of Him, a Belief about Him that is below His real

## 8     *The Peace that passeth Understanding.*

goodness and glory, will disturb the Blessedness of the most devoted Service. I do not like to name Examples—one shrinks from the irreverence of speaking of, or appearing to judge, the inward life of those who become known to us only by Eminence of some kind—but there are conspicuous Cases of what in a measure belongs to all of us, of Light without Faithfulness, of a marvellous power of seeing God with no power and with no Will; I do not mean with no desire, but with no *Will* to be conformed to Him. This can give no Peace: rather is it the exposure of a soul to the full eye of the Judge, looking with a sadness and severity it could not wear if in our ignorance we had a cloak for Sin. To *know* that God is Love, and not rest upon Him; to know that the Hand is God's, and not be willing to take the cup it offers; to know that the Voice is God's, and not rise up and obey it; to know that the Man is our Brother, and not help him from perishing; to be absolutely clear in spiritual vision, and abject and effortless in Will, this is possible; and perhaps no condition on Earth is farther removed from the felt Peace of God, for it seems to approach the condition in which He does most for us, and we do least for Him.

Neither, on the other hand, will an incessant activity of the struggling Will, an incessant offering of Good Works to express the debt we owe Him, give us the peace of knowing Him, if with the eyes of our souls we never see the Lord God, except in a character that is not His and that is unworthy of Him. And this, too, is possible. There are those

who in religious constancy, through energy of Will, put to shame many who far surpass them in justness of spiritual vision, and yet are themselves the blindest interpreters of God's Love, who believe that God our Father cannot in His own person make Righteousness and Mercy to *kiss*,—who, in the sufferings of Life, and in the appointment of Death, though it was the culture by which He perfected His own Son, can see only the awful shadow of the *Judge*, the stings of unconquered Sin, the witness of a Holy God against a World lying in wickedness.

“The Peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your Hearts and Minds *through* Christ Jesus,” that is, with the temper and method of *our* lives identified with his, hid with his in God. The expression, *through* or *in* Christ Jesus, implies that the garment of Peace will fit no spirit but his—that we must get more and more within the vesture of feelings, of personal relations, of filial and fraternal affections that united him to God and man. The knowledge of God that made it impossible to Christ to use any Name but that of Father; his Sense, at every point of the perishable surface of his life, that God was at its centre; the Obedience of his Love and of his Faith, these are the Elements of perfect Peace. In which of these is it that we are wanting? Is it that we really do not know that God is holy Love? Or is it that we will not rise to meet the purpose of His Spirit in all those times when our natural Humanity is tempted, suffering, afflicted, and depressed? Is it that we are thrown out of harmony



with Him, because in the midst of so much Sin and Misery we do not use the opportunities He gives us of doing the Works of our Father, and so do not permit Him to bless us as He would? Certain it is, that the first lesson in spiritual Life a Man has to learn is this, that the possessions that are most worthy to be dear to us are yet dear to us, under their present forms, not solely for what they *are*, but still more for what they *mean*, for what they express of God's intentions: and until we have learned this, the affections and the possessions that we cherish most, and that are most worthy to be cherished, are just the points where we are most open to be wounded every day through frailty and mortality; and beyond this, and worse than this, have in themselves no promise of perfection. Men of noble hearts who value Life for human Goodness and for human Love, but who do not feel that God is at the centre of their being, in the times even of their best emotions, of their purest joys, and in the very measure of their nobleness, are liable to a rush of sadness that threatens reason, so cruel seems the disproportion between their nature and its fate. And if there mingles with the sadness a feeling of resentful rebellion, of wrong endured, what is that but a witness to some latent root of Faith deep-planted in their Hearts, that they are in the hands not of Fate, but of a Personal Power whom they do not know and trust—but yet arraign? And so this Peace of God, passing understanding, is as necessary to any real enjoyment of our Blessings, in the day of their intensest life, as it is necessary for

our consolation in the day that from our earthly sight we lose them all. Religious Faith is ever the inner spirit of the most tranquil moments of possession: it is it that transfigures mortality, and makes us feel that it is good for us to be here: it is it that sees the promise of perfection in the dear familiar goodness, of eternal constancy in the daily fidelity and love, which are as ordinary things to common eyes, but full of infinite meaning to a Heart that knows how to value them, and that adds the faithfulness of God to their significance.

And according to the measure in which the Affections have had their earthly life rooted and hidden in God, do they readily adapt themselves to the great vicissitude, and open rapidly to a new Life of faith. I speak of what comes to us in Bereavement, through no effort of our Will, but by the Act of the Spirit in whom we live. There are times of utter inaction in Sorrow, when we can do nothing but *receive* the impressions that come, when all struggle ceases, all call to effort is over, and we are left alone with God and the Past. We can do nothing now to affect the final peace of the Affections. The time for that is gone. Retribution, in the form of the spiritual realities as they imprint themselves upon us, is alone with us. Our Hearts, like naked mirrors, are held up to Heaven to reflect the images of Truth, from relations all unalterable now. We are quite passive in those moments, receiving what is sent; but God is intensely active in us. In that pause of being, when the course of ordinary thought stands still, His Spirit takes the

place of ours and works our Life ; and blessed are those to whom it is then given to know an inexplicable Peace, in the existence of which at such a time they could not have believed—to whom the awful silence is tranquil and holy as with a divine Presence, and no Solitude is felt, for the Heart, led by a Love no longer earthly, has followed into Heaven. All life and its faithfulness is a preparation for that great experience ; and the air of eternal quiet breathing over the Heart of desolation is surely the Peace of God that passeth understanding.

But this Calm from the Spirit who bloweth where He listeth is not our final rest ; it is itself another invitation to new life and higher Peace, for God never long permits us to remain in the Past, or suspends us from our calling of ever new co-operation with Himself, in whatever altered conditions of our being. No change of circumstances changes this ; it only changes the Work given us to do. In whatever wreck has fallen upon us, be it of Health, be it of Wealth, be it of dear spiritual companionship, or, worse than all, be it from our own weakness and unworthiness,—the outward forms of our Duties may all be changed—the Service that is possible to a man in pain and sickness, to a man in poverty and low estate, to a man in solitude and bereavement, to a man in penitential self-knowledge, is now what God requires. The Duties may be severer in themselves, and with less of human solace ; but the demand of God never intermits that in Love and the Works of Love our life, out of its existing materials, should be to Him the richest

tribute we can raise ; for in reality it is He who is offering to us more of His own Peace in the opportunities of Faith, opportunities of so bearing and so doing His Will under trial, within the limits He appoints, as to enter not indeed into new Happiness, but, far beyond what we call happiness, into new Blessedness of Spirit. The Beatitudes of Christ are not at all in the language by which we would describe what we call Happiness, but they are the conditions of perfect Peace. And if we will aim so high—for it is ever our Mark that determines what we reach—if, knowing that only for a little time can we live upon the Past, that only in some sacred pause of being will God bless us without the active co-operation of all that still is ours of flesh and heart and mind ; if to the initial peace of submission and of love we strive to bring also something of the creative spirit of God our Father working in us, to mould as soon as possible a new symmetry and order out of the wreck His hand has made of the dear conditions of our life, we shall learn how little His service and His peace depend upon what men call Circumstance ; how it was necessary for a Saviour of Men to be their Fellow-sufferer, passing ever into the closer fellowship of God out of a straiter lot, a severer or a lonelier life.

And call to mind how great a Thing it is we are aspiring to, when we venture to speak of God's Peace in any connection with ourselves, for we know that we are asking for what God cannot give to the selfish, to the worldly, to the effortless, the unfaithful, the slow of Heart, or blind of Spirit. We are not

asking for what God could give without our co-operation—for happiness, for pleasures, for quiet days and nights, for exemption from pain and trouble, and mortal weariness and the burden of great cares. We are asking for courage, for fortitude, for self-forgetfulness, for the heart of Christ, for the fellowship of God, and to be worthy to suffer for their sakes. We are not asking to be saved from the Cross, but to have it laid upon us and to bear it well. We are asking for Souls to which God can come and make His abode with them, and we know that great Hopes cannot be given to mean, unenterprising men, nor foretastes of Heaven to the earthly, the sensual, the uncharitable, the unforgiving, nor the strength of the Lord to those who do not strive upon His side.

In the passage of the Text, St. Paul states with equal depth and beauty the conditions in us for a participation in God's Peace. They are these: the Trust that is natural to a Heart warmed by grateful memories of His former Goodness; the energy of Prayer to meet the present occasions in which, if we will permit Him, He is desiring to raise and bless us more; and, mark it well, a familiar delight and converse, a habit of intercourse, with whatever in this World is touched by the charm of Greatness, Goodness, and the Grace of Heaven. "Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication, with *thanksgiving*, let your requests be made known unto God. And the Peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your Hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. And, whatsoever things



are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of *good* report ; if there be any Virtue, if there be any Praise, take account of these Things, and the God of Peace shall be with you."

## II.

### Earth the Seed-plot of Heaven.

---

ISAIAH xxxviii. 1 :

“Set thine House in order : for thou shalt die, and not live.”

THE earthly portion of our immortal life must have some functions to discharge in the formation of Character, that will not equally belong to the heavenly periods. This is necessary truth to one who reflects on the unwasteful economy of God. In the material husbandry there is its own work for each season, which cannot be taken out of order, nor intermixed. And in the spiritual husbandry, from infancy to the allotted term, we cannot drop, or anticipate, or linger too long upon a stage, without injury to something that ought to have come in its time, and to have flavoured the quality of all that comes after. We must go through all our natural seasons, if we are to be ripe at last. No one should wish to see the characteristics of one period of life appear prematurely in another, for they can be anticipated only in an unhealthy form, and at their natural time will want something of the full mellowness of normal growth. A sweet, unburdened childhood ; an active, discip-

lined boyhood ; a studious, or enterprising youth, or both united ; a laborious and responsible manhood, full of high trusts, with objects and exercise for affection and for faculty,—in orderly succession, with nothing lost by the way, all the lower stages carrying their contributions into all the higher, are necessary to the perfection of old Age, whose attribute is ripe Wisdom, largeness of Nature, when white hairs emblem the full light in which all the colours of Experience blend.

And if this is so, can we look on to the celestial spaces of our life and suppose that the earthly space has no peculiar contribution of its own, no seasonal function in the natural history of souls, which, if lost, must in some sense be lost for ever? Can we suppose that God placed immortal beings under our conditions of mortality, with all these screens and veils on spiritual sense and faculty, with all that is most noble and blessed in us living upon trust, growing out of a root of faith and hope, unless there was something that made this necessary to our final ripening, something to be drawn forth, or infused into us, by this first season of our Father's husbandry, belonging to the essences of our imperishable life. And again, if this be so, can anything be more preposterous than an attempt to skip these earthly stages, or any part of them, to omit the present season in the tillage and culture of our nature, to fix our eyes only on the celestial spaces at which we are not yet arrived,—to transfer ourselves to conditions in which, as yet, our responsibilities, our duties, do not lie,—to

draw our life from a soil not yet given to our labour? It is most true that only as leading up to, and passing into, that celestial future, can we understand aright the meanest moment of the present; that only from the highest elevation accessible to us can we see this life as it is; but this is a reason not for neglecting, but for diligently observing, the uses of the time, as the husbandman while he lives in hope never works out of season, and just because of the visioned harvest is, whilst it lasts, exclusively devoted to the labours of the seed-time. Everything in our human life points heavenwards, but we must stand where we are, and from the things that we experience, given to our love and care, draw the heavenly foretastes, else clearly they belong not to the spiritual realm of Duty, but only to the unreal realm of Dreams.

What the whole of the peculiar contribution of this world may be to the ultimate ripening of our nature, the uses of the earthly seasons having no like times in Heaven, it may be impossible to determine; but there are certain elements of character, as belonging to a mortal—a needy and a veiled condition, in which we see as through a glass, darkly, liable to all kinds of suffering and mistake, as contrasted with a coming condition of open vision freed from physical illusions, which may afford indications of the frames of temper and disposition with which it may be the appointed service of this world to impregnate our souls. I conceive that we set our earthly House in order, only when, available for every present use that God would have it serve, the instrument and

the shelter of our fitting work, protecting, cherishing, adorning, perfecting whatever here is dear, it is also as the observatory from which we see the heavens and read the celestial signs; and that if we fill it with angel guests and with orderly tasks, we need not trouble ourselves about the evil spirits which come to houses that are empty, swept and garnished to receive them.

I may indicate a few of the special products and ministering spirits of our earthly house, frames of Christian temper, of which it is possible that this world is the seed-plot, the natural opportunities for which may not, in like fashion, occur again. And, first, with regard to that whole frame of spirit, pre-eminently Christian, which is produced by a suffering, afflicted, blind, imperfect condition of ourselves and of our fellow creatures, which takes the various forms of endurance, faith, compassion, sympathy, self-sacrifice, readiness to help. A man in whom this kind of spiritual fruit is not setting and ripening is clearly losing the uses of the earth. What can this World teach him, if it does not teach him this? Its seasonal function is not discharged in him; and his house cannot be in order. It must be full of wants that are neglected, of opportunities that are not met as they arise, of unheard appeals which, mute or spoken, cannot be resisted without accumulating against him—accumulating, too, the load of inhumanity within him. It is not necessary to pursue this line of thought, which would open out to any extent. Could any man wish this form of the mind of Christ to be absent



from his own Character? Yet it may be, that no like appeal will ever be made to it, that, if he has wilfully hardened himself against the seasonal want and invitation, a peculiar fragrance and flavour may be lost, and though the future disposition be in him, it cannot have a like exercise and a like test. At least, the common ideas of Heaven exclude the conditions of human nature which appeal to sympathy in the sufferings and necessities of Earth; and even the prophetic anticipation is of no pain, no sorrow, all tears wiped from all eyes for ever. But how could there be this infinite beatitude, if from a state in which we begin to aspire after perfection we are to have the retrospect of a neglected seed-time, of an unsusceptible soul in its day of opportunity? Every man who meets the want of the time, though only with the disciple's cup of cold water, who bears patiently with infirmities, who thinks for the thoughtless, who brings help to the helpless, whose love does not fail, though all it has to feed it is the great need for it, the occasions for its exercise, the sacrifices it requires, is casting his bread upon the waters, as seed-corn for a harvest that can in no other way be had. Then, let us set our house in order in the directions which God and Nature now give us: the heavenly mansions will have calls and fitnesses of their own.

The same kind of difference between this world and the next may make the earthly season of our life the fitting birth-time for another Element of "The Mind of Christ," our failure in which, when it was here appealed to, may touch the blessedness of

Heaven with a sense of wondering and sorrowful reproach. It may be here only that God veils His face; here only that tendencies full of blessed promise are suddenly broken off, or pass into death or darkness; here only that seeds of joy are buried or checked; here only that the Father gives indications both of His power and of His will to make the intense blessedness of His Children, and then drops the cloud of circumstance on the opening scene; here only that faith may have to overcome the world, and childlike trust have opportunity of bearing witness that the inward sign, the inward whisper, are enough to give patient waiting, and unbounded hope in God. I do not mean that faith in God can be superseded, but that hereafter the Evidence may be so ample, we may so live in the light of His goodness, so come to understand whatever has been trying or mysterious here, that no matter of experience could be more certain to us than that the hopes of the pure heart are the invitations and promises of its Inspirer already accomplished in the eternal Will. Even in this world matters of faith pass into matters of certainty, so that we forget the grounds on which our expectation rests. Both moral and physical expectation arise out of experience with as much confidence as if it was a matter of logical necessity, whereas we have no grounds of certainty that any experience of good in the past will not be disappointed in the future, except in the faith that God's love will not change nor fail. We have no ground for reposing tranquilly on any past experience as

a promise of perpetual blessing, except the ground of religious trust. There is no logical necessity that the sun should rise to-morrow. The physical necessity belongs to the supposition that things remain as they are ; but that must depend on the Almighty's will. " Thy word, O God, is settled in the heavens : Thy faithfulness is to all generations : Thou hast established the earth, and it abideth : they continue this day according to Thine ordinances : for all are Thy Servants." The faithfulness of God to every promise in His works is a pledge of His faithfulness to His every word of promise whispered to the soul, to every gleam of heavenly purpose that He causes to strike brightly upon us, however soon it may be engulfed in night and darkness. Every glimpse into the everlasting brightness, though the door is closed at once, is an appeal to faith, and marks the earth as the season for acquiring that trusting frame and attitude of soul, without which a seraph's open vision may want some element of filial fulness. When God shall unveil His face, and remove the screens of discipline, and all uncertainty shall have for ever disappeared, one shadow may remain which Heaven itself cannot then shine away, the remembrance of our past Distrust, that we doubted Him in the time that He appealed to the hearts of His children to confide in Him and walk in faith when for the moment the appearances were against Him, darkness beneath His feet, and the cloud before the Throne.

And our House may be disordered by failure of faith in man, as well as by unfilial distrust of God.

*Now* may be the time for testing all kinds of generous confidences, human or divine. As the love of God may for a time be veiled, so may the honour or the friendship of a Man, and that veil may bring no discredit to him, but a deep discredit to us, if we have not eyes to see through it, or confiding generosity to wait trustfully until it is lifted off. Neither man nor God claim our confidence without, or against, reason for trust; but the admission of suspicion, even in circumstances otherwise open to suspicion, after grounds for faith were once laid, may be fearful disclosure of what the knowledge of ourselves makes us capable of believing. Discernment of spirits is one of the highest attributes of pure natures, nor could there be more certain evidence of inward impurity, that the glass of our own soul was clouded, than that we are apt to receive impressions of wrong where no wrong is. A philosopher\* once remarked that the necessity for analytic chemistry might be regarded as arising from the imperfection of human eyesight; that it is possible to conceive a vision so acute that all the elements really present should be sensibly apparent. It is certainly possible to conceive a spiritual vision so pure that no element of good in a man could hide itself from us, and that we should be absolutely incapable of suspecting an element of evil where no evil is. And, again, all the common ideas of Heaven forbid us to suppose that this kind of appeal to confiding trust will be needed there, that *there* the soul of honour and love can be so hidden and veiled by

\* Dr. Thomas Brown.

circumstance, that only honour and love can find them, and hold fast faith in them. *There*, we are told, we shall see face to face. Then is there not a seasonal spiritual function in this life of earth, if it thus throws both man and God on the pure faiths and instincts of the soul in a way that may not occur again? To the pure all things are pure: our House is not in order if this spiritual lamp of Trust, which our earthly life both needs and feeds, is not its central Light.

There is another spiritual fitness which may only have earthly opportunity. There are susceptibilities in the same man so different that they might seem to belong to two natures; and there is an aptitude, more or less acquired by use, to elicit in our fellows the evil or the angel nature. Even Christ felt the touch of an evil power in unspiritual man, as though it might dim the divine instincts of the soul. "Get thee behind me, Satan, thou savourest not of God." Now that is a peculiarity of condition that, on both sides of it, may disappear from the heavenly state. It may be here only that we shall be under temptation to awaken in another thoughts and passions that had better sleep,—to cloud, defile, or obstruct the happier nature by sting, or taunt, or evil provocation. And it may be here alone that the desire to speak to what is good and noble in another, and to abstain from casting wicked fire, may distinguish any one. That must be the universal disposition of Heaven. The satanic desire to touch dormant evil, to awaken dormant pain, cannot exist there. I do not mean that



Heaven will not be a place for the formation of character ; but that the present conditions may disappear from the new heavens and the new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness ; that all special conditions have a fruitage and flavour of their own ; that only where it was peculiarly needed, and peculiarly tempted, can the spirit which would sweeten and purify human hearts be a distinction, and its possession here give privilege of entrance without shame and remorse on the universal goodwill of Heaven. Then, no man's earthly House is in order, in which any unhappy tendency is needlessly provoked, or any angel spirit unsolicited.

Again, it is impossible for us to know how much even of the natural aspects of this world may be only seasonal, and never occur again. There may be other adaptations of external nature to other growths of soul. God may not repeat the great discourse of His Works, as now we read it. Other heavens may open around us, and in a land where there is said to be no night and no sea Nature must have other teachings, other solicitings than those we know here. Yet, who can doubt that there is a wisdom and a spirit ever seeking us, ever breathing itself towards us, from the nature that is now around us—from morning and evening, from sunrise and sunset, from cloud and shadow, from lake and mountain, from tree and flower, from form and colour, from light and darkness, and the worlds that darkness reveals, which make the spiritual appeal that in this our earthly stage we need and are fitted to take

in, and which if we miss through hardness, negligence, carnal self-absorption, low insensibility, from the idle or the sordid thought that God does not speak to His children through His Works, we must suffer a special, it may be an irreparable, loss, for no one believes that these things must return again as here they are. And the Lesson of all is this, that we love, trust, and study every aspect of the life that is now around us; that we confide, and diligently abide our time, in the school in which the Father has placed us; that we draw from it its natural spirit, and meet it with the response and receptiveness it demands, assured that it is the fittest training for us; that we shall best set our earthly house in order by no contempt of it, but by contentment with it, by deep delight in it, by earnest understanding of it, by hospitality to every guest and influence God sends into it; and, above all, by faithfulness under its changing conditions to the creative work of our souls, in building up the best that is possible to us out of the materials given to us, or left for us from the wrecks of time.

For, if our House is set in order for life, it is set in order for death. Death is but the passage from life to higher life, and the only readiness for advancement in our Father's service is, that when our Lord cometh He find us faithful in the Work given us to do. We may trust our God to arrange the stages of our progress; in assigning us our place here He knows the employments and the exercises that will best fit us for entering with full faculty and delight

on the higher posts of His service ; and it is not piety, but presumption, or impatience, or poverty of sympathy, that would transfer our interest from where we are to some visioned sphere were we are not. It cannot be the fulness of spiritual life, but the feebleness of it, that finds our appointed service not enough for our affections, our efforts, or our rewards.

Yet the break that Death makes in all present relations does introduce special necessities, requiring preparations and arrangements for leaving our post suddenly, without warning, that would not be needed if our progress was one of continuous earthly development, and we were to live on here for ever. When we are called away, our earthly concerns must lie as the call finds them ; our hand never touches them again. That might be of no significance to those who pass onwards, did it not affect survivors ; but in affecting them it becomes a test of our preparation for the great change. "He that loveth not his Brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?" He that is careless of what confusion and desolation he leaves behind him on Earth, how can he be in the temper of Heaven ? Thoughtfulness for survivors is therefore one of the touchstones of fitness to die, of the preparations being made, of the House being in order. Our "House" embraces those who are beyond ourselves, and yet are part of ourselves. Have we made the earthly house sign, type, prophecy of the heavenly home ? Have we lived in the faith, and is it dear to us to die

in the faith, that those who are nearest to us, those of our house, are to stand by our side for ever? Is our family life a state of order for death and for immortality, so that if we vanished from our place to-night, we should leave for the morrow no tangled circumstance which only we could put in order, no unspoken word that needed to be spoken, no cry of agony out of any heart for one hour more of Earth to set things right for ever?

It is not that any work or interest of Earth is to grow pale, and look insignificant, in our anticipations of Death and Heaven. On the contrary, we have no heavenly life in us, nor fitness for it, unless it gives meaning, richness, glory, and the joy of promise to the Earth. Only through our connections with the eternal, can we value aright the fleeting moments of this world. "Set thine house in order: for thou shalt die and not live." The sentence is gone out, irreversible, incommutable; nothing is uncertain but the time; we are only reprieved from moment to moment, from day to day. But, if to live is to be under the culture of God for higher life, and to die is to gain that life, then we would spend the time of our preparation not as in a condemned cell, but as in the ante-chamber of the eternal Home, as within sight of the glad and awful brightness, within hearing of the sweet and solemn music,—if not in full fruition, yet in faith, hope, and loving expectation, not without a vision of angel faces,—in righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit, as those who have experienced something of what it is to have the Father

and the Son abiding with them, to whom eternal life, not altogether unknown, already planted, and rooted, and bearing fruit, has only to be transfigured in the beatific Presence, when the earthly tent-house of these pilgrim days shall be exchanged for the building of God, the house not made with hands, eternal in the Heavens.



### III.

## Christian Dynamics.

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PHILIPPIANS iv. 13 :

"I can do all things in him that strengtheneth me."

IF a man wills to do God's will he partakes of the strength of Christ ; he is as the Vine that is rooted in the Father, and the sap of the divine life rises in him. The desires of the heart, the insights of the mind, the inspirations of the soul, become realities of character, constituents of an everlasting growth, when they culminate in a holy will. Until this, the end for which they were given, has been reached, our spiritual faculties are but elements "to convict us of sin, and of judgment." Intellect may legislate, imagination gaze, conscience rebuke, desire grow sick with longing, and yet "*all things*" remain as they were, because in the inaction of the *personal* power there is no executive.

Physical Science, whatever possibilities it discerns, can accomplish nothing without a working power adequately applied ; and Moral Science may demonstrate what might be, what ought to be, yet contribute nothing to the dynamics of a perfect life. And a great lesson is brought home to us by observing how

physical science passes from theory to achievement. The discovery of what is possible may long precede the fact of its accomplishment. There is higher science than art has yet reduced to use ; and there is higher Morality, as in the Sermon on the Mount, than men have yet reduced to practice. In each case the *instruments* are wanting, to execute theoretic possibilities, to exemplify spiritual laws. Man has been defined as a being who has to make his own tools. What we call our material civilization is from improved instruments. Centuries ago men foresaw the wonders of modern art. By supplying the adequate instruments it has transferred the previsions of theory to the daily miracles of experience.

And in the spiritual kingdom it is still by the power and the fineness of the instrument that the possibilities of God, the commandments in the heart, the faiths of the soul, the standards in the conscience, the visions and prophecies of the spirit, are transferred from the thoughts to the life, and become realities of Character. Every Christian man believes that the life of Christ, the goodness of Christ, is attainable, though only Christ has attained it. The human possibility has no impassable limit, but it has at each moment an actual limit in the purity of our hearts, in the composition of our will ; and what is possible to man will not be possible to *us* so long as our spiritual executive is the same imperfect instrument and motive power that has brought us no further on our Christian way than where we now stand. It is manifestly true that the qualities of Christ are precisely those which

man requires to adapt him to his present place and develop his eternal growth, and therefore that we could do all things in him that strengtheneth us, if we had the mind of Christ, living to and from God speaking in us as he lived to and from God speaking in him ; but this will not be possible so long as we gaze upon him with only the pictorial faith, the outward eye which has its object at the dim distance of eighteen centuries, and instead of the image after which we were made formed within us, contemplates him as an aërial meteor of a world not ours, without roots in our humanity. The things that are impossible to man are possible to God : the things that are impossible to man without God are not only possible but natural to man when he co-operates with God working in him. You may gaze for ever on an example set before you, on a goodness which, if gained, would be the kingdom of heaven within you, and yet be nothing but a gazer, because your will is too feeble in resolve, your soul too untrue in impulse and in love to aim at and execute the work proposed. It is as vain to expect a common life from all orders of spirits, as to expect a common performance from all orders of instruments ; our inward nature, our personal being must become the seat of a new power before the aims and lessons of Christianity can be brought down, from the region of conception, to the business and the bosoms of men.

It is fully understood how one man can accomplish apparently with ease what to another at the utmost tension of his existing capabilities is impossible ; and in the case of the same man at different times, how he

may be so inspired, so full of strong desire, so braced and high-hearted, so set upon the execution of a purpose, or so languid and dispirited, as in effect to be two persons, at one moment equal to trample upon difficulties which at a less holy or resolute moment trample upon him. And it is not the amount of anxiety you bring to a work that carries you successfully through it ; it is the power you bring to it ; and if the instrument is inadequate, no anxiety will avail, except so far as it contributes to raise the power. But in spiritual things *we* are both instruments and agents ; we work with our souls, and to achieve higher or severer work, our soul, our personal power, must be recast, making what before was impossible to become possible through new indwellings of God. No man can do the works of Christ unless Christ be in him. If a man has not the spirit of Christ he is none of his : whilst his temper is vindictive he cannot forgive and love his enemy ; whilst his heart is worldly he cannot love and serve God without reserve. It is vain to set a high standard before us, unless there is an adequate loving and moving power within us.

And this may account for the despondency, or resentment, that sinks or chafes many a heart when a wider vision of our higher life, and the great example of Christ, are pressed home upon it. It is conscious of increased demand without increased power or will to meet the demand. We become at enmity with truth which we cannot deny, and will not appropriate. With a mingled feeling of despair and injury the spirit stiffens and resents, as though a hard task-

master was continually increasing work without increasing faculty. And it were indeed a vain expectation to be uplifting for ever the standard of the cross of Christ, requiring the same spirit that had been unequal to a lower to rise to a loftier goodness. It is discouraging to be made to see with our minds, with our reasonable conscience, that our responsibilities are gathering, the way of a true life ascending, whilst ourselves remain the same, with not one fresh impulse of love, or hope, or faith. It is inevitable that one thus placed, under sense of a grander life, with no new force to live that life, must become an idealist, a spiritual voluptuary, or sink into a reproachful dependency, or take refuge in a determined distaste for the contemplation of Christian obligation, of the perfection proper and possible to man. Conscious that in his existing state of soul and habit to profess to exemplify Christian standards would be a dream or an insincerity, a man who hates pretension is tempted to pronounce as absolutely visionary what is visionary to him, and in open scorn to take the lower place as the only real place, with a spiritual pride of his own which, because of its plain honesty, is not unpromising.

This is, in part, the explanation of whence it is that Christianity has been ineffectual to rear in the general conscience its own standard. Christian life is growth from a seed, but in our ambitious way we have thought more of the great tree, with its top reaching unto heaven and the birds singing in the branches, than of the inward power that rears that stately grace. We have so perverted the parable that



we make more of the visible grandeur than of the invisible vitality. In eagerness for results we have overlooked the hidden life, and lost our Lord's lesson. Christian obligations have been pressed, when it would have been better to present Christ himself. Even under the Gospel, the Law has been preached and trusted rather than the spirit. Mistaking the Master's directions we make dry and hard demands for fruit, without supplying the tree with the waters of life. Unspiritual moralists are always reiterating their sterile cry for facts, and always distrusting, or failing to feed, the only source from which results can come with ever fresh grace and power. Out of the heart are the issues of life. It is altogether true that "by their fruits ye shall know them." But it is equally true, and on the same authority, that you cannot gather grapes from thorns, or figs from thistles—that only from a great heart great deeds can come. It is not the fruit that makes the tree, but the tree that makes the fruit. Men have set forth Christ as though he taught by commandments, another Moses enforcing a better law, a more enlightened Master in the same school and with the same discipline. But the method of his spiritual teaching is what is peculiar to Christ. He spoke seldom of an outward kingdom of heaven, of observable results, but continually of the seeds, the roots, the springs, the living relations with God that cannot fail to produce them. The Law came by Moses ; grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. Duty as an outward standard repels or appals ; living goodness attracts and subdues the

whole nature in the conscious delight and awe of the desire and the power to do likewise. Too much has been said of the greatness of the work, too little of the only source from which it can proceed. We are all too didactic and preceptive, laying down the Law, making too little account of the heart of life, the springs of holy love moved of God to all fine issues. If a man is spiritually weak, failing in obvious duty, our method is to press down upon him a severer sense of his responsibilities,—that is not to raise the power but to increase the weight, as if by the rational act of enlarging his conception of what is required from him his will and aspiration must spring to the same proportions. Moralists will never enable us to be perfect men; they can lay the burdens on our shoulders, they cannot touch the sense of power; whereas if the spring of life is reached we lift these burdens willingly, and find in ourselves a law, receive from God a law, which carries us to fields of labour into which no mere Moralist can logically compel us, and from that law of the spirit, of self-sacrifice through love, we come to know that nothing is impossible to us.

We must mark, indeed, with strictest eye our moral deficiencies, our shortcomings of duty towards God and towards man, as the dweller in the valley of Egypt when he marks the deficient crop knows where the river of life has not come. The dweller in the valley of Egypt can do nothing to make the flood swell, but to us in the spiritual husbandry it is given to touch the fountain spirit and bring the river of God's grace into our souls. When Christ was asked

for the commandments of eternal life, he gave in the same breath the law and the spirit, the weight and the power ; thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy mind, with all thy soul, with all thy strength, and thy neighbour as thyself : all deficiencies in duty are deficiencies in love. We look the wrong way when we look to the vastness of the work, instead of to the power which makes the yoke easy, the burden light. We look the wrong way when we sigh over the heavy call "to do all things," and turn from the glory of being able to do all things in him that strengtheneth us ; that if there is no limit to the possibilities of man, it is because there is no limit to the fellowship and help of the spirit that worketh in him. Why measure our tasks, and leave the power which must accept these tasks, the soul that is in us, unlighted by the hope, cold to the love, uninspired by the faith, unvisited, unawed, ungladdened, by the living presences which would make duty a task no more, but the dear service that is perfect freedom, as with the heart the will of God is done in Heaven ? The stature of our lives is the stature of our souls. We cannot have a divine life with a self-centred heart. No man acts beyond the height of his inspirations ; no spiritual man consents to act below them. What *is* his Soul ? What is its range ? What is its sensibility ? What is its law ? What aims, what standards does it place before him ? With what divine persons does it hold him in communion as inspirers, standards, judges ? This is the one vital question. Whether we can lead

the lives of God's children, whether the Sermon on the Mount is a call to which we will respond, or *can* respond, depends upon our having souls that are baptized into the faith, filled through and through with the sense that God is the Father of our spirits, that every impulse to good is from Him, His prompting and leading, not our presumption. It is not for us to impose a spiritual law upon ourselves, but if God lays it upon us, then it is God who is drawing us to Him, and pledging Himself for the result. If He calls, and we hearken, He will not leave imperfect what He has begun. *He* will not deny the relation Himself established. He who took the first step in making us sons and heirs, will also take the last. He who calls us, will justify His call; and He who justifies will also glorify; He will not desert us halfway upon the heights if we do not drop His hand. Whether we can do the works of Christ, whether we can feel that our natural life would be the filial submission and obedience, the fraternal sympathy and self-sacrifice of the Sermon on the Mount, depends upon whether we have the spirit of Christ in us. As well try to make a tree grow by pulling forcibly at its top, as urge Christian perfection upon a man who at the living springs of his heart does not feel himself to be a child of God. The Sermon on the Mount is a hard law, it is an impossible law, except in the strength of the divine relationship it assumes. To the soul that feels the relationship, all is changed; the law becomes inspiration; its yoke our birth-right, our inheritance of glory; and Christ's words,

however slowly we may grow to them, neither strained nor strange, "Be ye perfect, even as your Father in Heaven is perfect." If any one amongst us could feel, as St. Paul felt, that Christ was Son of Man and Son of God, if any man's soul was imbued through and through with the faith that he was so fathered and so brothered, that man could take up St. Paul's words in simplicity and truth,—“The love of Christ constraineth me:” “I can do all things in Him that strengtheneth me.”

If any one thinks that this is refining overmuch, that without this movement in his soul he can serve all the needful purposes of life, and do his duty where providence has placed him, we ask, What is his life? What is its purpose? What are its ends? Is it to be a citizen of this world, or to be a citizen of the Kingdom of Heaven, to accept the soul that God has given us, with all its responsibilities of growth? Is it to have an honest and a kindly life for a time on earth, or is it to have, and to know that we have, an eternal life in God?

Nor for these ends have we to look beyond this life; they are in our hearts to know them and do them, and their appointed accomplishment by us, our accomplishment in them, is now on earth—not yet in heaven. We have only to hold our station, using its opportunities, accepting its sorrows as signs and witnesses of what has been, pledges and promises of what is to be. We are God's building: we work under Him; we cannot, without spoiling it, hasten His work, or take its orders and directions out of the



Master Builder's hands. If our appointed place, our work of life, is not as clear to the disciple as it was to the Master, is it not that we do not equally wait upon the inward signs, and yield ourselves to the divine promptings? He who looks into himself for the germs of faculty, and observes his fellow men and their wants with a sympathizing heart, cannot long be in doubt about at least some things which God would have him do; and *he* cannot want light and leading whose soul is full of pictures from the life of him who was the Way and the Truth, who answered the prudential suggestions that sought to restrain him when God was calling him, "Are there not twelve hours in the day? If a man walk in the day he stumbleth not."

And we are learning to "do all things in him that strengtheneth us" when we exercise the mind, the heart, of the Son of Man within the near home circle designed to be the spiritual image of the whole Family. The Church is only a larger household of brethren, the spiritual children of one Father. And we are made to feel and know the divine signatures, the heavenly marks, on those of our own house, that we may be fitted to discern them everywhere. If we are faithful in that which is least, we shall be faithful in all, to the outermost circle of the alien or outcast; for there are no two ways of spiritually looking upon man. We cannot see the divine imprint in one man without looking for it, believing in it, however latent, for all men. And so Christ, though honouring them with his dying lips, never exaggerated the claims o

blood and earthly lineage. He made them universal. His friends were the kindred of his spirit. He who stretched forth his hands and said, "Whoso doeth the will of my Father, the same is my mother, my brother, and my sister," could not exalt an accident at the expense of a spiritual reality. But the home comes before the world or the Church, as the nursery in which love is trained to "think no evil," discerning there as in a mirror of mankind "the heart of goodness," how the sense of right can be strong under surface outbreaks of wrong, and gentleness and resentments, tenderness and jealousies, self-sacrifice and jets of passion, high thoughts and dishonouring habits, intermingle with clearest signs that only the noblest will survive. No Christian man will deny that it is possible to grow for ever in the holy charity that is spiritual discernment; and, as we have it, we have with it St. Paul's power "to do all things in him that strengtheneth," for it hopeth all things, beareth all things, believeth all things, endureth all things, and never fails.

We "can do all things in him that strengtheneth us," when Christ is so formed within us, so lives in us, that as Members of his Body, which is his Church, we are in his personal relation to the Father, and receive the witness of the Spirit that we have eternal life from God. The flesh and the spirit, the mortal and the immortal, are indeed unequally yoked in our earthly frame; but how else could the higher nature declare itself, strengthen under trial, and go on unto perfection? How could we be assured of a living principle that unites us to God if it had *no test*, if it could

not prove an indestructible life, that it depended not on circumstance, that temptations, even when yielded to, could not silence it, nor trouble overwhelm it, nor earthly confusion blot its witness out? Yet must there be no violence. It is not by extinguishing anything natural to man that faith and the soul establish a kingdom of God on earth; it is by preserving every element, honouring every member, recognizing the claim of every desire, but holding each in its own order, and in due subordination to what is higher than itself and to the whole. Natural infirmity is one of the conditions of spiritual strength, as a difficulty, a conflict, is the condition of a victory. What would be the worth of faith if nothing ever interposed between us and the unclouded face of God? It would be a small thing to have our eyes always turned to the light of heaven if they were never dimmed and moistened by earthly tears.\* The more complete a man is the more will they be so moistened, but the more also faith will supervene. No doubts could attach to the Fourth Gospel on the grounds that it would have been unworthy of Christ to have wept at the grave of Lazarus, touched by the profound pathos of that mortality which yet he knew to be but an incident in the divine life of man,† or to have experienced the agony and preparation of self-distrust before the supreme hour in which he most signally

\* "Too proud would be the eye ne'er moistened by a tear."

BLANCO WHITE, *Life*, vol. ii. p. 329.

† "Sunt lachrymæ rerum, et mentem mortalia tangunt."

VIRGIL.

witnessed to and glorified his Father in Heaven. If human nature had no legitimate weakness, and knew no mortal pang, how could spiritual life, personal faith in God, exist, or manifest itself? Our calling is to be Christians, not Stoics : we are not to destroy anything that is in man, but to stamp it all with the divine image ; and we deny ourselves only in exalting ourselves to our true vocation. He is but half a man who is not touched with the infirmities of man. We have not to be strong in ourselves, but, "tempted in all things," by choosing what we know to be our highest guidance, by obeying the heavenly voice, to let God perfect His strength in our weakness.

Finally, we "can do all things in him that strengtheneth us" when, through much communion, we take the divine impress, and are changed into the same image as by the Spirit of the Lord. This is what is meant by putting on the Lord Jesus, by having the same mind in us that was in him, by being branches in the vine, having the same life-blood flowing through us. It is the burden of a still stronger metaphor, which appeared harsh even to Orientals who had through spiritual sympathy no key to his meaning. "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" "It is the spirit that quickeneth ; the flesh profiteth nothing : the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life." For occasional effort we might collect occasional strength. Even feeble and capricious men can brace themselves to do magnanimous things upon occasion ; but for the constancy of the Christian life we must have a constancy

of the Christian temper, and that comes only through the heart's converse with the living fountains of grace and goodness. There is a growth of pervading and dominant influence with which in kindred cases we are familiar. It is understood how the love and the power of nature gain upon us through thoughtful intercourse with Nature. It is understood how the discernment of beauty becomes delicate, as though a new sense was created, by familiarity with the masterpieces of Art. The eye rolls in finer light, and an organ, a faculty, an insight, is gradually communicated which no didactic teaching could convey. In the presence of Christ we come to see what we did not see before. We had walked like men born blind until our eyes were couched by the vivid light of living goodness. We may gaze long on the face of Nature without finding its spiritual expression; but suddenly the complex harmony yields its meaning, and we look as it were upon the face of God. And so, when in the struggling elements of our life we meet the look of Christ and see our divine opportunity, spiritual order is established, and we rise to his call in inspired strength, or behold ourselves as through his holy eyes in stricken penitence.

And this we must remember: A spirit that can continually strengthen may not plead natural frailty or imperfection as exemption from the *next* step in self-conquest or progress. What is required from us is only *growth* out of a right heart; not perfection, which belongs to God only, but a "going on *unto* perfection."



#### IV.

### The Faith that overcometh the World.

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I JOHN v. 4, 5 :

“This is the Victory that overcometh the World, even our Faith. And who is he that overcometh the World, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God ?”

RELIGIOUS differences among Christians would be of no significance if we were well grounded on what the scriptures mean by Faith. Faith is personal Trust in spiritual Beings, inspirers of the life that is in us as God is, realisers of the earthly possibilities of that life as Christ is. Faith is the inward Knowledge that a divine Life belongs to us, as the vocation of our nature, through our experience of promptings from Him who is its Source, and of affinities drawing us to those who have that life in themselves. Only the inspiring and upholding power of living Persons, making us partakers of their moral being, is of the essence of Faith. Belief is not Faith : there may be Belief to any extent, and no Faith. A man may believe in God and have no faith in God, no sense of a living God near his bed, around his path, the providence of his life, the Holy Spirit in his

Conscience, the Appointer of the steps he should walk in. A man may believe in a future life and have no Faith in a future life, for Faith involves us, as children and as heirs, in the essential life of God, feels the eternal issues of our hearts, reads the present by its light, puts immortality into every dear affection, into the eyes through which we look on every child of man, on every opportunity from God. Belief in a future life may be a state of the understanding ; Faith in immortality, with the Martyr Stephen, sees the heavens opened, and the Son of Man, Mankind imaged in the Son of man, on the right hand of the throne of God. A man may believe in the existence and mission of Christ and have no Faith in Christ, no Christ formed within himself the hope of glory, dwelling in the heart by faith, to the end that, rooted and grounded in love, we so know the love of Christ that we too may be filled with the fulness of God our Father.

And if faith does not consist in the belief of spiritual Existences, neither is it to be confounded with the acceptance of any doctrinal statements that can be put into words, or made the subjects of propositions respecting such Existences. Faith is not assent to propositions ; it is the sense of a living and supreme Authority in the hidden man of the heart. A man may accept any of the Creeds, of the Council of Trent, of the Confessions of Augsburg or Westminster, of the Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England, and be without the Faith that overcomes the World. We may know nothing of a man's Faith,

of the life that feeds his soul, when we have fully ascertained his Creed.

Neither is Faith attained by the most unhesitating acceptance of an historical Revelation. You may receive all the facts, or statements, in both the Testaments, and neither understand, nor be ruled by their spirit, having nothing in yourself of the confidingness of Abraham, of the loyalty of Moses, of the susceptibility of David, of the spirituality of Isaiah, of the fire of Paul, of the filial heart of Christ.

Once more,—to close our account of what Faith is not,—we have no Faith in what we fear. Faith, like Love, casts out fear. Objects of terror cannot be objects of trust: we cannot live in them, and by them, an inspired and blessed life. They may be accepted as realities, and they may be realities,—sin, temptation, pain, moral corruptions, the separations of death,—and then if our faith in God does not illumine, interpret, and subdue them, they will extinguish our faith in God. Awe and reverence attract; elements in the love and confidence that cannot be shaken; fear repels. The Apostle determined the characteristic difference between Belief and Faith;—"the Devils believe and tremble." The clear proof that none of these constitute Faith is the absence from them all of its essential attribute, "the power of overcoming the World." We all know how possible it is to accept the whole Christian Religion, and yet to let the World dwell too close to our hearts, to be the slaves of its pleasures, the dupes of its vanities, the puppets of its breath. We all know how possible

it is to give our assent to awful facts of life and death and judgment, and yet to have sensuality and sloth rotting our noblest powers, or the worm of envy and mean jealousies gnawing at our hearts. And we all know that terror overcomes nothing but the abject mind it terrifies—that it is not gladdening, elevating, self-forgetting—that in their hours of despair men become reckless and abandoned.

States of Faith, then, are states of spiritual Vitality in which our souls respond to the touch of living Powers who appeal to what is highest in us. We are in states of Faith when God, and the image of God in our humanity, are personally operative on the conscience and the heart, on hope, on love, on aspiration—when the light of all our seeing is drawn from the Father who moves in us, and sustained by the obedience of His holy child in whom the light was life. When is there faith in God? When He quickens our conscience, unveils our sins, destroys our solitude, thrusts the awful glory of His righteousness on our every retreat, and through all that can disquiet or alarm sheds from Himself a peace that passeth understanding. When is there faith in Christ? When he so lives in us, the image upon Earth of our divinest vocation, that he will not let us sink below his own standard, or violate his spirit, without acute pain and shame as guilty of resisting the witness, entreaty, and appeal beyond which none can be conceived, and crucifying the Son of God afresh. When is there faith in Immortality? When it makes sacred in our eyes the spiritual nature of every man; and sets every

joy, sorrow, and temptation, God's promise, or God's discipline, in the light of that essential, eternal, life which is fellowship with Him.

Take, in confirmation, the great examples and heroes of Faith. Abraham is the Old Testament type of its perfectness. *What* did he believe? He believed nothing to which the word "what" will apply. You must put it in the personal form, "*Whom*" did he believe. He *believed* God, not merely that He is, or anything whatever of the modes of His being, but that He is true and faithful, incapable of deceiving, incapable of betraying, incapable of disappointing an expectation Himself has raised—and that having come into personal relations with him, and spoken a word to his inmost soul, nothing in the world of outward experiences could be found in irreconcilable contradiction to the promise and whisper of His spirit. And what was the nature of the temptations that tried in vain to shake this faith? The trials of Abraham's faith, if they were repeated every day, are not of a nature to prevent any man signing any of the Creeds; against no Belief of that sort would his practical difficulties have had the slightest disturbing power. Nor were they of the nature of those mysteries of speculation, of scientific analysis, which by disinclining men to theories of God cause them with such blind precipitancy to be classed, and sometimes to class themselves, with unbelievers. No—but they were of the nature of those dread mysteries of life which still assail the sinking heart of man, which try to dim the spiritual eye by crowding on



it repugnant things as the only realities, and in the face of dark experiences to pluck the bright hope out of the soul. When present and palpable fact, broad, prominent, awful, undeniable, conflicts with a divine expectation, contradicts it, postpones its completion, seems to render it impossible, laughs it to scorn, then are we tried with the trials of Abraham's faith. When Nations go back in civilization, when they avow great principles only the more pointedly to give them the lie, when they break up old governments in the names of liberty, fraternity, equality, only, in the quick disappointment of incapacity, to deliver themselves to a master, and surrender the reins to a selfish despot,—or, having written on their Charter of Independence that all men have equal rights, make a man a chattel and a property with no personal rights, then might the faith that looks for the coming of God's Kingdom to Earth be tried with more than the trials of Abraham's faith, for the predicted ages recede indefinitely, the powers of life seem to be tried and found wanting, the principles that are professed are the principles that are dishonoured: men know the Truth, and it does not make them free.

Again, as often as human life is without sacredness, without sense of responsibility, without felt connection with God and with His purposes, without any of the deep affections which guard themselves from pollution, when body and soul seem of one mould, so that death appears not to take the dishonoured spirit from the clay, but rather to return the whole whence it came, earth to earth, ashes to

ashes, dust to dust, then does faith in human immortality pass through an ordeal far more disheartening than Abraham's trial, for here the difficulty is to show any ground for faith, to make out the claim of such a being to an eternal life, for to commit him to annihilation would seem no injustice to his nature, no disappointment to his hopes.

Again, when human misery rolls around us like the waves of a restless sea, and threatens to overwhelm all that it surrounds, when philanthropy can only wring helpless hands, and the wisdom of the wisest do no more than suggest palliative measures to reduce the woe when it appears, when the benevolence of the world is for the most part employed in filtering the foul stream of evil, curative rather than preventive, wrestling with ills as they arise but not knowing how to close their open fountains, and when all this exists at the most advanced period of civilization, when there is more wealth, more knowledge, more power, more accumulated capital, more instruments of production, more facilities of distribution, more thought, more energy of love concentrated on this one problem, of how to mitigate and destroy the sources of human wretchedness, than earth ever witnessed before, then does a heavier cloud attempt to obscure faith in providence than weighed upon the heart of Abraham, for he had only to wait in trust for God's action, whereas we amid the un-reduced sufferings and horrors of the brightest era of mankind, in war and universal preparations for war, in bloodshed and inhuman ambitions, in the public good

subverted for selfish ends by the unscrupulous falsehood and baseness of party politics, have to discover for ourselves the secret of His rule, the traces of His presence, the underlying purpose of peace on earth and goodwill to men, and then by our own insight, sacrifice, and action to work His Will, and vindicate His ways.

We perceive, then, what was the nature of Abraham's faith, and what in our own experience is of like nature to it; and we know that this, and no other, is the type of New Testament faith. "He is the father," says St. Paul, "of all them that have Trust, of all, whether circumcised or uncircumcised, who walk in the steps of his Faith." Read the chapter in the Epistle to the Hebrews, where the lives and deeds of the heroes of Faith are recorded, and you will find their spiritual rank measured by their reliance on the inward whisper and promise of God's spirit, when all the outward world of experience seemed in arms against their hopes. Or turn to Christ's words, and observe what kind of Faith it must be, to suit the case, when he delights in a man because of its force, and speaks, or looks, him into shame because of its weakness. When the centurion, a Roman soldier whose creed was far from faultless, besought him to heal his servant, in the confidence that the powers of disease were as much at our Lord's command as the soldiers of his own troop were obedient to his orders, it was surely not of his beliefs but of his trust that Christ said, "I have not found so great faith, no not in Israel: go thy way, and accord-

ing to thy faith be it unto thee." When he thanked God that what was hidden from the wise and prudent was clear to babes—when he rebuked the failing faith of the disciples in their fear that he and they were perishing together in the Lake of Galilee—when he caught Peter by the hand and upheld him on the water, saying, "O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?"—when he spoke of the Faith that could remove mountains of difficulty, is there a moment's doubt that he was speaking of personal reliance on God, of the heart's occupation by Almighty goodness and holiness, of the all-conquering enthusiasm of the affections and the will when they have living inspirers and leaders, and feel the spiritual world and its interests to be supreme, real, and near.

And there is no true sense in which Faith and Reason are opposed. Faith has no sphere into which Reason does not penetrate. Reason and experience present the evidence when Faith discerns the inward meaning, seizes the clue, and confides in the invisible reality. Reason, indeed, has a sphere which does not belong to Faith, because the things within that sphere are not of a spiritual nature, having other witnesses than those from the soul: but faith has no sphere which does not also belong to reason. When I have faith in a man, because of my experience of him, that he is good and just and true, my conviction is not of the nature of demonstration, nor can we say of any man that it is absolutely impossible he should disappoint our confidence, yet our faith is founded on large grounds of reason and experience submitted to

our inward moral discernment. And so is it with our Faith in God: the Reason that commends it is more absolute, the experience it springs from immeasurably richer, its witnesses everywhere, without beginning and without end, still it is spiritually discerned, the soul acknowledges it, the heart is possessed by it: it does not belong to the department of sense or of science. Things known by demonstration, or sensible experience, or unquestionable testimony, or logical inference, are not matters of Faith; there is neither generosity, nor purity of heart, nor childlike simplicity and prophetic vision, in believing them: you could not disbelieve them if you would. But God appeals, trusts for the acknowledgment of Himself, to the insight of the soul, the witness of the heart. You are now within the region of Faith, but you are not out of the region of Reason; you are where there is no demonstration, and the outward eye does not perceive its objects, and testimony without witness of the spirit is of no avail, but you are where consciousness has had commanding experiences and large discourse of God, and where Faith, the apprehensions of the soul, are not less reasonable, though of a higher order, than the perceptions of the understanding and the senses. Faith is properly contrasted with sight and syllogism, not with Reason. All convictions of Faith are also convictions of Reason, but Faith has its realm wherever, over and above facts and logic, spiritual discernment is required.

And even more palpably groundless than the supposed opposition of Faith and Reason is the sup-



posed opposition of Faith and Works. A faith that does not operate is as much a contradiction in terms as a magnet that does not attract. Belief may be a purely intellectual state touching no active emotion, but "Faith worketh by love." It is of its essence that it lives and moves, and has its being, in, and for, and towards those in whom its trust is, its objects of worship, its models of duty, its springs of inspiration. The living God, and the living imprint of God in our humanity, become, through faith, the feeders, the comforters, the instigators, the standards and masters of our existence. Faith is that condition of conviction and emotion, of will, affection and desire, in which whatever is real and enduring in us is felt to belong to a Divine Life of which we are partakers through the spirit of our Father in us, an inexhaustible life, of endless growth, hid with Christ in God. It is the prompter and support of all effort, of all interest in the souls of men, of all sacrifice and practical goodness. How could we love and toil for a nature in which we had no faith, no faith that God cares for it and holds it sacred, no faith that, at the best, it is anything more than a flowering weed hurrying away on the stream of time? Or, how without Faith could we discharge the highest offices of love, to be the friends of a man's soul, to resist him in his evil, to lose our lower life, ease, and pleasure, for his gain, to wound him that God may heal him, to endure giving him pain and suffering for the sake of that without which he is dead while he liveth? It was through Faith that a son of God was able to be

a Brother to other children of God who as yet had no understanding of his spirit. "I am not alone, for the Father is with me." But a man without Faith has neither a Father nor Brethren of his spirit, and when he mingles with men he shares their worldliness, or hides apart in awful solitude. It is the root of all reverence, of all respect for ourselves or others, for if a man does not cleave to One who is ever drawing him upwards, ever convicting him of evil by ever inviting him to holier life revealed to conscience, what is self-reverence but pitiful self-idolatry? And it is the reconciling, the binding, the cementing power in human life. Beliefs separate; Faith unites. Opinion, speculation, pride of intellect, pride of knowledge, are schismatic powers. Faith draws into one church of the living God all who thirst for the divine life breathed forth by our Father, and taken in by a Son who lived in, and by, Faith. St. Paul speaks of the righteousness of Faith, and the school men reconciled Sin and Salvation by imputing Righteousness to faith alone; but the real opposite to the righteousness of faith would be the absence of righteousness where there is no faith. The righteousness of Faith is the righteousness that springs from Faith, the mighty works of love and sacrifice that are born of Faith, and what is contrasted with this is the dwarfed stature of goodness, the poor sapless life, the timid or mean ambitions, the unaspiring heart of a man who is without faith in God, or in the reality of any image of God in humanity, who draws his life only from himself, who, in scripture imagery, is as a stagnant

cistern of wasting water, with no fresh, inexhaustible, supplies from a living Fountain.

Faith is concerned with *life*, with spiritual realities, with hunger and thirst for righteousness, with aspiration and effort after all purity and goodness, growing out of trust in the moral Inspirer of our conscience, animated and upheld by the Models of true life, the life that cannot perish, in those children of our Father who, touched by our infirmities, tempted as we are, have reached towards the stature of perfect Man. Belief is concerned with intellectual apprehensions, with the mind's opinions, inferences, or perceptions of truth abstract or experimental. We believe in God when we infer a First Cause. We have faith in God when we know that we are never alone, that we are "haunted for ever by the eternal Mind," by the Spirit who cannot separate Himself from His children, "partakers of the divine nature," made in His image, and by Him for ever called to grow therein. "Can a woman forget *her child*?" The symbol is too weak; she is not the source of life, author and giver of good. "Yea, she may forget, yet will not I forget." And God teaches and invites by sample: He nourishes and encourages faith in the life He prompts by the power and grace of a Son of Man who had faith in the spirit of his Father, in whom light became life. The movement of God's spirit in every soul of man now reveals in Christ to what, to whom, it points. Scepticism cannot chill it by uttering the mocking words, Unreal, Unreal. In "the captain and perfecter of Faith," we have "the substance of things

hoped for, the evidence of things not seen ; ” “ the Desire of our eyes ” set before us ; the things that are counted weak overcoming what the world deems strong ; meekness, purity, love for God and Man, the soul’s eternal life, reducing to nothing all other distinctions ; the servant of all, the Master of all, in his most commanding attitude when stooping to wash men’s feet ; serving, living, and dying for his brethren because they were the children of his Father ; and whilst seeking not his own raised, with acknowledged authority, to the place of highest greatness, as the most perfect type of life which heaven permits to earth.

And now, how are we to strengthen that Faith through which the world is overcome ? By becoming children of God ourselves, through observing and honouring the inspirations of our Father. The promptings of Faith it is not ours to originate ; that is God’s work in us ; it is ours to keep, cherish, and obey them. We can quench His Spirit in us by not listening for it, by disregarding and dishonouring it. God gives to every man as much of the suggestions of holiness, love, and faith as he will receive,—but the Holy Spirit respects the reserve which is everywhere the law of spiritual intercourse. God offers Himself, but does not force Himself on a reluctant soul. He could not do it without superseding Faith itself, without extinguishing our spiritual life with all that is free and filial in trust and love. Therefore we can turn from Him if we will, and let Faith perish because its promptings are dishonoured. Like all

living powers it is strengthened by its own acts, by works of faith adequate to express it, by prayers of faith breathed out of the life which God quickens, and reaching towards the life which Christ fulfilled, by meditations of faith keeping its realities near the springs of our being, "musing till the fire burns." In whom a man trusts and lives depends on his obedience, in sonship or in bondage, to the spirit working in him. No man can expect that the Holy Spirit will continue to be imaged in the mirror of a nature that is turned away from Him, that is clouded with impurity, disordered or convulsed by unworthy passions. The faiths of the soul are kept bright by the corresponding fulfilments of the life, and a dishonoured nature gives no fresh revelations. Every impulse from God that leads to nothing retires; or, if it remains, remains only as a sting. If we had kept the primal harmony of being which Christ characterized as the image of the kingdom of God in the unspoiled instincts of our childhood, if daily obedience as the sphere of life gently opened had kept clear the fountain of living water, and the spiritual ear attentive to His whisper in us, to what energy of faith and purity of discernment, and continual delight in action, might we not have reached as by the stages of a natural growth! And to one who would become God's child again the way is always open. We have but to look into His face to know that we had been walking in our own shadows, that we had turned away from Him, not He from us. He who takes it for his essential life to work out what God works in



him, will fill his soul, and the world of opportunities, with the presence of the Holy One. He who for righteousness' sake overcomes whatever is lower, in obedience to his Father's spirit, will come to know what it is to have Christ formed within him, dwelling in his heart by faith. And he who loves his earthly friends and all his earthly fellowships for the sake of what is sacred in him and them, will never, in any shadows of the valley of sin and death, lose sight of the fulfilment of the promises as sure as God is true, nor feel himself far from the family in heaven, the household of our Father, the unwaning lights in the city of the Eternal King.

## V.

### The Fatherhood of God.

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EPHESIANS V. 1 :

“Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children.”

A RELIGION that, rooted in the Fatherhood of God, legitimately makes such an appeal, and looks for such issues of life, has no natural connection with error or limitation, and is potentially coextensive with absolute truth, absolute goodness, and the service which is perfect freedom. When Christ said, “Be ye perfect even as your Father which is in Heaven is perfect,” he condemned all theologies which make piety foreign to man, and declared our spiritual nature to be constituted in and for God. We cannot grow unto a likeness of God unless a seed of God is in us. Whatever accidental errors may have historically connected themselves with such a Religion, it is not answerable for them; they are not growths from it, but accretions and hindrances upon it. It is no more answerable for them than the stars are answerable for the Ptolemaic system, indeed far less, for the stars utter no audible protests against false theories,

they do not warn men against misinterpretations in spoken words as God in Christ has clearly done. It is plain that a Religion which in impulse and in object is coincident with the eternal Spirit, and proposes no aim but the development in man of fellowship with the All-perfect, can have no essential connection with anything transient or imperfect ; such things may, through human frailty and inherited prejudice, cling to it for a time, but they must fall off as not belonging to it, since its own roots are in the living springs whence proceed Truth, Beauty, Goodness, and the harmonious Laws of universal being ; its prompting force is communion with the holy Love that rules in all things, and its limit is God Himself. The imperfect medium of its first hearers and later interpreters, the accidents of transmission, the false philosophies of the ages, may have encumbered it with many mixtures of obscurity and misconception, but by native power it separates itself from these as freely as the wind blows the cloud, and the sun melts the vapour, off the face of heaven. Asserting nothing, aiming at nothing, but the possibility, duty, and delight of growing oneness with God, it is manifest that it casts off whatever proves not to be of God, that in its principle it is coincident with all Truth, in its spirit with all Goodness.

Even if it could be proved, which in its essential issues or germs of growth cannot be proved, that the Teacher of this religion stood with his contemporaries at an early and imperfect stage of opinion in relation to some questions of social or prudential ethics, this

would not touch the perfection of a religion which impregnates man with quickening principles and methods, which does not profess to give the results of speculative discussion on every human interest, but to draw men's souls towards the Fountain of truth, to fill them with a right spirit, to train them to a right method, to set their faces in the direction of the Source of light. A Master who taught his followers that they must think through God's mind, and feel through God's heart, and act through the inspirations of God's righteous will, remains the same, yesterday, to-day, and for ever, through whatever growths his own spirit may develop, as an oak remains the same when by vital power it expands in height and girth, or overgrows an accidental scar ; and when Christ taught men that because of kindred nature, because they were God's children, their truth must be as God's thoughts, their affections as God's love, there lives as God's holy will, he gave us commission to disown, in his name, whatever was not of God, even though a thousand scriptures should appear to contain it. If we are to grow, through the quickenings of God, towards God, it would be monstrous to suppose that nothing new was to develope itself, or that any former state of man could be the measure and standard of his last. If men grow they must change for the better, and if they change for the better a time must come when, continuing one in spirit, they shall have outgrown all former products of that spirit, all but the perfect Son himself. If *he* is one in affection and spirit with the Father ; if the Almighty Will still flows into him and

becomes his own ; if his life in heaven as his life on earth is ever in the plane of God's action ; if he still grows, as he taught his followers to grow, from a root of God, they can never outgrow him ; he remains the representative Head of Man, Leader and Lord for ever.

It is vital for us to feel that when Christ calls us to be followers of God as dear children he is not issuing strained or impossible orders ; that he is appealing to principles acknowledged, authenticated, and reissued by our own souls ; that he is calling us to act not against our nature but according to our nature,—according to our whole nature whenever, as a whole, it is harmonized with itself, and against even its lower and perishable impulses only when they are permitted to break the unity of our being, and, instead of keeping their place of orderly subordination, to riot and rule alone. By the natural supremacy in us of conscience and of love we are *constituted* in and for God.

This argument which gives obligation to Christ's appeal by the response to it in our own souls, drawn not from what we are but from what we are inwardly moved to be, has to be deeply and universally felt if the Christ is to be "formed within us." Insensibility to us was, and is, the ground of the World's unbelief. Christ himself was grossly misunderstood because men would not adopt his introspective method in spiritual things, and verify what he declared by looking inwards to read what God had written in their hearts. What, mainly, are the Gospels but records of



attempts on Christ's part to make the inward nature of man a witness to God's spirit, and of misconceptions on the disciples' part when they could not understand his appeals to their spiritual consciousness, and asked him to speak more plainly? Nay more, what to this hour perpetuates the grossest misconceptions of his spirit and his truth, permits the most incongruous mixtures to obscure his doctrine and overlay his power, but the preference of men for outward before inward and spiritual teaching, for pictures in words before pregnant principles, for schemes of salvation on definite verbal and logical systems that can be learned like a catechism, before seeds of Faith deep hidden in man's nature but reaching towards the Infinite? What made, and makes, the Christian Church a House divided against itself, and the Reformation to become Anti-Christ, cursing more than blessing, breaking the unity of the spirit into mutually repelling factions denouncing and condemning one another, restoring to Romanism the breath of its life, but incapacity, because of unbelief, to develop our whole theology from what is contained in the first words of the Lord's Prayer, that God is our Father, that the pure in heart see Him as He is, and believe with the heart unto righteousness,—to take the spiritual issues from this faith as our truth and life, and cast off whatever is inconsistent with them as alien alike to God, to Christ, and to us?

The essential principle from which religious life proceeds is that God has given us a spiritual nature kindred to His own, so that our perceptions of right,

our love and pursuit of goodness, our reverence for holiness, are in their essence identical with the affections and principles that exist and reign in Him. If this were not so, to call God our Father would be to use words meaningless or false. A Parent is one who imparts his own nature. This alone separates the idea of a Creator from the idea of a Father, and accordingly we do not call God the Father of animals, rocks, and trees. If this were not so Religion would be as impossible to us as it is to animals, rocks, and trees, for the feeling and conception of God must be for ever inaccessible to us if God did not implant it in us, if God in the Conscience did not reveal to us that it cannot be its own source, that a Holy Spirit breathes in it and holds towards it the relation of Inspirer, Sustainer, Reprover, and Judge. It is the portion of kindred intellect God has given us that enables us to discern the traces of the infinite Reason. As the print of footsteps on the sand of a desert shore makes known to the shipwrecked that a man has been there, so when the mind of man begins to read the Universe he discovers with awe and trembling the imprint of his own thought upon creation's face. He is stirred with reverent fear to find himself so near the Source of all things, for knowing our weakness, our dependence, our beginning, our end, our conditioned being, what could so move us to the recognition of one fountain Spirit as that Nature, which to us seems infinite in space and eternal in time, should thus reflect upon us our own image? God, says Plato, works by Geometry. Now, that science is a pure creation of human thought,

absolutely independent of material things. It borrows nothing from experience, and asks no verifications from without. Yet when we turn to the Universe, we find the Creator and Ordainer framing and disposing His Works according to principles which in the abstract, without reference to concrete things, reveal themselves as necessary truths to the intellect of man. Could there be clearer evidence that the God who made the worlds gave Man a share in the principles of thought and reason according to which the worlds were fashioned? As has been finely said, "We think God's thoughts *after* Him." A star which was never seen is first discovered in the Astronomer's calculating mind as a necessity from God's laws, and then the telescope is set to look for it, and *finds* it. I do not adduce this to prove that the same God made the universe and man, but what is immeasurably higher, that the God who made the Universe made Man in His own Image, gave him in understanding an access to Himself, capacity for approaching for ever towards the infinite Mind. God is the Creator of animal instinct and intelligence : He is the Father and Original of human Reason.

In the Spiritual World our access to Him is more direct, our kindred nature more obvious. The Universe and our own intellect display a God of power and wisdom virtually infinite to us, but only our spiritual nature manifests a God of infinite Goodness, gives us an awe of Holiness, sets up in us a standard of Perfection, and, all frail as we are, binds us in closest ties to a spirit before whom Sin must tremble

and hide its face. The outward world is not the Mirror, or manifestation, of absolute Goodness ; that revelation is given to and by the human soul. Whence is this ? What are we that we should dream of Perfection ? What are we that we should think of being saints, and be abashed every day because we are not ? What are we that we should deal to ourselves such hard measure as to try our thoughts, our deeds, our virtues, our sacrifices, by the exactions of a Goodness which we do not see exemplified, and which condemns our best as shortcoming and poor ? Who, or what, is He who is constantly judging us, touching us with a sense of unworthiness, though we never see Him, so that all our days are passed under the shadow of His tribunal ? Why do we not cast off this awful, invisible Exactor, and lead the free life of unspurred, unbridled Nature ? We cannot ; the conscience that is in us is not our own, and we cannot set aside one tittle of its Law ; the Spirit that is in us prompts, orders and commands, and has its authority acknowledged : every man knows that he is not dealing with himself alone ; that when guilt-stricken and full of remorse, he is not merely condemning himself, but trembling and bowing his head before the God and Father of his spirit. God calls us daily to an unattained Goodness ; our own nature responds to the righteousness of the call ; and this is just the relation between a Heavenly Father and an aspiring Child.

Have we no objective verification of this spiritual obligation to follow God as dear children ? Have we

no outward sign that we have not mistaken the inward voice, that we are not dreaming of a duty and a glory to which we are not called, for which we are not fitted? Yes; what our spiritual nature preaches and prophesies, Christ fulfilled. In him God put the crown of accomplishment on the indications of Conscience, on the filial aspirations of the soul. There is our warrant, our encouragement, or our condemnation; for he who in his own person condemned and conquered sin in the flesh, now condemns us if sin has dominion over us.

And if God is our Father, what is our birthright? Let us enter on our inheritance; "if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ." What is involved in this relation when we take it in its fulness, feel it as a faith, and adopt it as a life? It is possible to feel strong movements of it in our nature without obeying it. It is possible to know much of struggle and endeavour under constraint of law without sense of divine encouragement, or glow from God on the affections. Only when faith and love beget life, and life strengthens and verifies feeling, and this action and reaction have long gone on, does the fulness of the relation become known, and a richer experience grows out of faith, and faith is brightened every day by the fuller testimonies of experience. The initial sense of divine relations, out of which proceeds the exhortation to follow God as dear children, without which the exhortation would fall as dead and meaningless as if addressed to a stone, involves the faith that by fellowship of spirit He



has immediate access to us, and we have immediate access to Him ; that by instigations, promptings, reproofs, calls, and opportunities in the discipline of His providence He is for ever seeking us, doing all that is possible to draw us to Himself without destroying our individual will, forcing our affections, and so obliterating the divine image in us ; that nothing intercepts this action of God but the darkening of the heart through disobedience, the surrender of ourselves to the lower instincts of our being through the suppression of the higher ; that our Father, because He is our Father, will persevere for ever with the applications of His Spirit until we "come to ourselves," and to Him our light of life ; that to whatever depth the sinner may have sunk he cannot annihilate the neglected seeds of "the divine nature" in him ; that the moment "he comes to himself" there is an open way to his Father, with visitations growing in power and clearness with the reverence they receive ; that on this way of ascent, since there can be nothing in God's spiritual being of which God's child may not partake, and God is infinite, there must be eternal ages through which to grow into the likeness of the Perfect,—the immortality needed for such a destiny being manifestly the birthright of a child of the Eternal.

Will you say that this is too much to infer from the words "Our Father, who art in Heaven, hallowed be Thy Name"? Yes, truly, if it is but a word. Yes, truly, if you think that Christ, and the witnessing spirit in you, are mocking you with metaphors. But

if it is a true word, and not an irreverent fiction, then all that we have deduced from it is but the poorest shadow of the glory it involves. If Christ was not "speaking that which he did know," if he was using figures of speech with no corresponding reality, then, indeed, we should have no outward verification of the law and the prophets in our souls, and the charge of the Jews against the Christ, that he was blaspheming when he called God his Father, would hold good. The charge is meaningless against him who *lived* his doctrine, and achieved the Sonship he declared. "Say ye of him whom the Father hath sanctified and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest ; because I said, I am the Son of God ? If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not."

I have used the word "Inspiration" to express the communion of God's spirit with our own. We feel that He is in communication with our Conscience to prompt us to goodness, to filial and brotherly acts of service, and to impress the authority and sanctity of His Will upon us when we are inclined to shrink from its severity. At critical times in our life, under the sense of failure, weakness, and disappointment, in the discovery of some root of evil in those with whom we are allied, or to whom we have given our love, or of some dread hollowness in ourselves ; then, when all security seems to be drifting away, and the foundations of our being to be breaking up, if we turn for refuge to the faithfulness of God, the Father and Inspirer of the nature which seems to be betraying

us, in that moment of light, the light of the knowledge of the Holy One, all our trusts revive in the clear discernment of the soul that the faithlessness is with ourselves, that we have fallen away from Him, not He from us. This is inspiration: when a peace that passeth understanding, which does not belong to the circumstance, but comes from Him who is above the circumstance, "is shed abroad in our hearts." It is deplorable that even the Christianity which exists amongst us, false views of the Mediation of Christ tend to obstruct personal communion with the Holy Spirit, to enfeeble the sense of the direct access of God to the spirits of His children. It is a tendency that has become Anti-Christ, for by it Christ is made to subvert His own purposes, when instead of "*showing*" us the Father, leading us to God Himself, the Bible and Christ become substitutes for God. This is essentially idolatry. Anything, however excellent, however needful, that supplants God becomes an idol, and we are in the practice of idolatry when we so employ it. *We* make even Christ an idol, we make our elder brother our God, if he does not so lead us to the Fountain of our souls that we feel our Father's spirit moving in ourselves. Only when we adopt into our life this religion of the Father does faith in God acquire its full power, when we hearken to every prompting, and give obedience to every word—the obedience of an earnest and loving child, though with struggle and against the will of the flesh, until it becomes the unconstrained service which is perfect freedom, when inspiration and desire, no more

at conflict, unite their strength in a holy will as the actuating and the consenting forces of the soul. Then shall we be growing into the likeness of God, in all we do, in all we forbear to do, our whole ordinary life become religious and prophetic, our conversation as religious as our prayers, our relaxations as our toils, our fellowship with all orders and conditions of men the issue and outflow of our fellowship with their Father and our Father.

Is the difficulty of this still the strongest impression that remains with us? But, Christ achieved it. Will you say that he is no example for us? Why so? Are you sure that it was not also difficult to him? Rather, must you not be made certain, if you study his life, that in its initial stage, which is our stage, it was difficult to him? Why do we go on looking at him as a celestial being belonging to another world, a passing angel cleaving with bright wing our earthly atmosphere, and never learn to look at him as he really was, the man Christ Jesus, tempted in all things even as we are, touched with a feeling of our infirmities, encompassed by our conditions, rising, not without struggle, out of the trials of our humanity because ever listening for his Father's voice? Why do we not realize what he tells us of his heart's sorrows, loneliness, and sinkings; out of what long faintings went forth the cry, "My God, let this cup pass from me," and how the thought, the prayer, that gave him strength, "Father! Thy will be done," is the prayer that in words we utter every day? It is not that Religion has not had, and has not still, the

power to wring mighty sacrifices from men, for in no other name, in no other cause, have men willingly undergone so much. What else could exact such frightful penances, such dreary, cheerless lives, such obscure, unhonoured hardships, such utter excruciations of nature? But the religion that has done this has too rarely been the religion of the Fatherhood of God. Some distortion of Religion, the terror of the future, the fear of judgment, the possibility of escape by voluntary penalties, have taken stronger hold upon certain self-regarding portions of our nature than has the love of the All-holy, and the All-merciful, upon our whole being. Men who worship God as a Sovereign to be expiated, believing that by nature and Birth-sin they are aliens, with no access to Him, unable to do His will and under sentence of condemnation, have realized and paid the uttermost sacrifices that Fear or Law could suggest,—but how many of *us* have, with equal vividness, gratefully felt and gladly paid, the filial service faith in Him as a Father prompts. If in that character we have not embraced Him, the power that lies in the relation has not yet come forth. In this there is a reserve of hope for the world: for if the imperfect Religions have extorted so much, only because distrust of Him, and care for self, could terrorize imagination, what blessed kingdom of heaven on earth has the religion of the Father, “Be ye perfect, for I am perfect,” yet to produce! When shall we begin to believe the words we speak, to live the faith we profess? How poor we are! How puny the doings, how timid the



hopes, how faithless the fears, how stinted the human charities, how downcast the mien, how low the ambitions, how faltering the onward steps of those who yet walk under banners that bear the inspiring words, "Be ye followers of God as dear Children."

## VI.

### The Kingdom of God without Observation.

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LUKE xvii. 20 :

“The kingdom of God cometh not with observation : neither shall they say, Lo here ! or, lo there ! for behold, the kingdom of God is within you.”

A MIND in willing subjection to the spirit of the Gospel is the Kingdom of God. He reigns in the Heart whose will is one with His. He has a Kingdom where Truth is sought and followed ; where Hope with Love are ruling ; and all the *Strength* we have is striving to give Life and Body to the inner faiths of Heart and Soul and Mind.

The expression, “The kingdom of God,” through that common figure of language which by fine transition passes from means to end, from cause to effect, from process to result, or *vice-versâ*, is often employed in the New Testament to denote the Power that brings the soul into harmony with God,—any or every portion of that quickening Life which we gather into one complex name, and call Christianity,—but this leads to no ambiguity, and only implies such absolute reliance on the Grace of God

in the Gospel of His Son that the same words designate the Power that acts upon the souls of men and the glorious consummation of its Work, the centre of intense individual life from which the Kingdom of Heaven begins to extend, and its universal extension in the World. And whether by this comprehensive expression we are to understand *a soul* which the Father of Spirits has drawn into harmony with Himself, or the living Power, that works on character and moulds it to God's Will, or the whole Family of Mankind, when it shall consist of saintly souls and be a Family of God,—in either of these senses, it accords with the Genius of our Religion, that it is quietly developed, secret and silent in its workings, that “the Kingdom of God,” too sacred to be ostentatious, too genuine to be rapid, too deep to be quickly comprehended or seen by the outward eye, “cometh not with observation.”

The most obvious sense in which it holds true of the reign of God in the soul that it cometh not with observation, is that its growth is too pure, too natural, too much in accordance with the mysterious and hidden Laws of Life, to be at any single moment outwardly prominent. Even in cases of sudden Conversion, the fount within that is freshly opened is deep and secret,—and it is only the struggle between the old Life and the new Spirit that for a time makes itself observable. Take the moment in which, according to the divine order, a soul first awakens to the secret of spiritual Life, that is, to a personal recognition of a Father in Heaven whom it is to cleave to

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and obey ; and from that hour of spiritual birth, if no persistent sin of ours interferes to break it, there would be a normal progress, not maintained by fits and starts, nor struggling towards its place by violent efforts, but, with the inner force of all things that have Life in themselves, running its parallel with Eternity.

There is no element of the Kingdom of Heaven whose seed is not buried deep in the hidden Man of the Heart, and whose growth is not slow : seeing that we are not growing for to-day or for to-morrow, nor towards a limited stature, nor within perishable seasons, but towards the inexhaustible Father, and with Immortality for our Time. God Himself, who communicates to us all the Life we have, is received by degrees of illumination into our understandings and our Hearts. All History declares how slowly man learns to know God—I do not mean to imitate Him, to grow in His image—but to *conceive* of Him as He is—to know what the Image is in which we ought to grow. It would be unhistorical to assert that any man had ever before his soul the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, until Christ gave us the spiritual Image in living form. Nor does that great revelation of Christ remove the necessity for *stages* of growth with any one of *us*. The spirit is given unto us by measure as we are able to bear it, and measure after measure must be given before a man knows God as the Son knew the Father. For no teaching can convey the full idea of God into the soul of child or man by a sudden Revelation. More

easily can you force the blossom from the seed without waiting for Heaven's air and dews and light and seasons to unfold the hidden flower. Religion can be taught only experimentally, only according to the personal experiences a man has of incentives from, and communion with, the Holy Spirit,—and if this was understood, God's Providence would be largely justified,—for it would be felt that each Soul must go for itself, through its own cycle of quick-darting Life as from the shooting of a seed, of dawning light, of light struggling with darkness, of doubts like mists clearing off and passing away through doing, being, and believing,—of growing knowledge, of faith becoming dominant and peace confirmed. The experience of others may doubtless at some of our stages remove difficulties and speed our progress, but only by helping us to the same experiences as their own; Christ can help us only by making us like himself; for the soul must reach God, as the mind reaches Truth, through *its own* apprehensions, by the pathways of its own sensibilities, its own hold upon the eternal realities presented to it. None but God can make a soul feel its want of God: none but God can make a soul feel the presence of God. It would be infinitely easier to find a royal road to Science than to spiritual knowledge; whoever feels our nature's connections with the living God must know them from his own findings, and in a sense that is strictly true be as their original discoverer. No *flood* of Light can be poured upon a soul, that will render unnecessary the strengthening discipline of



wrestling with Powers of Darkness, and putting forth inward might against unlawful dominion. Witness the prayers, the retreats and agonies, the victories through faith and trouble of spirit, even to his last hour, of Christ himself! No really noble dream of Heavenly rest is permitted to a soul that has not wrought its way to that high conception, and through cherished purities and self-denying efforts formed acquaintance with Perfection. No rush of Sight or Faith carries us at once into the unveiled Heavens by vision or by ecstasy, so as to supersede our trials and our trusts, or to enable us to dwell with God through any easier means than those of a blended experience in which our Father's face is veiled, and the kindred spirit of His child has to remove the covering shadows, and discern the Light within the Cloud.

We thus come by continual growth into the knowledge, and into the enjoyment, of our ever present Father, as into a spiritual possession:—we possess God, and God possesses us, as we have real habits of practical piety, and take into ourselves the several hues of religious feeling, whether of Aspiration, of Gratitude, of Trust, of Resignation, of quickening Love, of suspended but undying Hope which belong *to the experience* through which the God of the spirit causes us to pass, and the fulness of His kingdom is surely coming in a soul which is thus learning to appropriate His teachings. For, every blessing that in this way we trace back to God is living knowledge of Him who is more to us than all

His Gifts; every *effort* of duty, by giving a consciousness of inward strength, of a reserved Power, of an inner spring of Life, is real contact with Him towards whom all duty is an approach, and who thus rewards it; every sorrow that finds no Comforter but God, and finds him sufficient, not to dispel suffering but to find Patience and Hope, brings home to us the consolation of an eternal Friend; every gleam of happier or of holier Thought, that seems to come by chance, reveals the bountifulness of Him with whom we have to do; every natural grace, every mystic expression that flits over the face of Creation, puts us into spiritual intercourse with the Creator; every hour of silent communion leaves the Image of Heaven in our Heart—until by these “*unobserved*” advances God gains over to Himself the whole realm of consciousness; and in the inner convictions, habits, and order of our life has at once a Temple and a Throne.

And if the *Knowledge* of God must thus grow in the soul from a child’s first sense of a living Power within the Conscience to the God and Father of Jesus Christ, that spiritual Goodness which is His real image embodied in us can come no faster: our likeness to God will always fall behind our best thoughts of Him—for our best thoughts of Him, if we are faithful, are always growing; nor can it be unknown to any of us that the Kingdom of Heaven may be far from us long after we have fully felt that God is our rightful King. *Perfection*, even as an Imagination, as an ideal Picture, as the theoretic solution of the practical problem presented by the mixed elements

in our nature, does not break upon the soul in one conception; and if it did, it would go as it came, a gliding dream which we had no power to reduce to practice, to model into life. It is by faithfully acting according to the measure of our light, contentedly making the efforts we are equal to, finishing the work that comes to us where we stand, making careful studies of the smallest parts of a dutiful life, as a painter studies the veins of leaves, and thus holding in permanent colours whatever spiritual Beauty has dawned upon us, that God permits us to grow to fuller strength, and discern the more glorious symmetry of completer aims. The Kingdom of Heaven thus substantiated spreads itself: every pure thought that we strive to avow in some act of life, every merciful prompting that we shrine in some real word or sacrifice, removes the debilitating and infidel sense that we are only spiritual voluptuaries, instead of visionary Dreams, brings us near to the living God Himself, and lays the foundations of our House not made with Hands upon the Eternal Rock. It is thus that the Kingdom of Heaven advances upon us. It begins with fragments of duty, and with imperfect comprehension like that of the Disciples, speaking as they were moved, yet not knowing what they said. The proportions of the finished Temple are not yet perceived, the Design is with God, not with us; but the work grows under dutiful Hands—each day's patience and love are developing its form—each new grace of acted feeling is an inwrought ornament, and if we are but faithful in the performance of every

clear service, righteous to pursue even the least prompting of Conscience and of Love, we are silently rearing that House whose real Builder and Maker is God, even as the symbolic House of God rose into the air like a jointed plant, with stones made ready beforehand that dropped silently into their places, so that no noise was heard in all the building, nor any sound of hammer, axe, or tool of iron.

And whilst the Kingdom of Heaven is thus visibly advancing, visible in the result though not in the process, the *principle* of our religious life, the working spirit in the character, is meanwhile undergoing change, assuming new and deeper power. Obedience to some fixed rules, to some authoritative will, was our first conception of Goodness. A few simple directions to be implicitly followed, a few simple feelings to be cherished and loved, make our manual of duty so long as we can lean upon others, and are fenced round by elder care. But as soon as we stand alone, and have to answer for ourselves, cases occur to which our rules do not apply; we are thrown into situations where feelings, it may be passions, are called into play which we had not known before; our small maxims and precepts give us no help in the new conditions, and prove unable to guide us, and then do we silently begin to outgrow all narrow formularies, to exchange rules for principles, outward laws for an inward spirit, and to approach God, as the only Standard of Right, with a more filial worship that brings nearer to the opening soul the vast idea of a Heavenly Father's perfect-

ness. There is a period in the life of every growing soul, as there was in the life of mankind, when often unconsciously we pass beyond all limited examples and formulated virtues, when the motives that are most influential change their nature, and the moral arguments that are addressed to the men of this world cease to have any sensible application to the scale and order of our thoughts. Prudential reasons for Goodness are then felt as an affront to a pure spirit: they do not seem in any way to touch our real Life. The Law, as a schoolmaster, came in our days of preceptive training: Grace and Truth came with our recognition of a Son of God. The Law which we are now to follow is the Righteousness of Faith, the fruit of a spirit that loves God and must be like him, that loves man and must serve and bless him. To be *like* our Father, to do *good* to our brother, is the Law of the Spirit of Life in a Son of God, and when we have reached to this, then is the Kingdom of Heaven come nigh unto us, and God has found a worshipper in spirit and in truth.

We might adduce other illustrations of the gentle and still formation of that spiritual-mindedness which is the goal of all our way. The contrasted elements of a perfect goodness require large experience, they do not come together suddenly, they do not combine rapidly, and they are all found in peace at last only in a soul in which the presence of God Himself leaves no room for any evil spirit. The discipline of Life which forms Character, or rather which gives opportunity for the action of those inward powers which



really do form it, opens gradually, often without observation. It comes by parcels : and we are advanced to new social relations, and have different parts of our Nature called into exercise, and schooled by trial, as we become qualified to bear the weight they lay upon us. The tenacity and continuity of Habit resist any sudden, involuntary expansion of the Kingdom of God : our strongest and most spontaneous affections before they *do* great things, or make great sacrifices, need the sustained pressure of the conscientious Will. It is no flash of feeling that is to create a soul anew ; no agony of desire, no paroxysm of remorse, that is to transform a character. And so we pass to the practical conclusion, that if the Kingdom of Heaven cometh not with observation, then no moment of its natural growth must be lost. Brilliant and rapid advances we are not to expect : *they may come*, but if we look for them, if we stand and wait for them, we effectually prevent their coming, and have passed out of the order of God's Law. The Life of Christ is beyond the sudden grasp of Genius or of Will. The Kingdom of Heaven suffers no violence : and in vain the violent would take it by force. The spirit of God and of Goodness may indeed strike instant root in a Heart, but how long and patiently must it grow, and what prunings must it suffer before it bears only the perfect fruits of the Father's spirit. If one effort could attain unto it, if one agony of the gathered Will could reach it, it might for a term, though not sinlessly, more safely be neglected ; but now no season can be spared from a

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work to which *every* touch of Life adds unconscious grace, and which, because of its nature, being indeed the Life of the infinite God within us, never can be finished. The Kingdom of Heaven is not the result of straining efforts, of one distracted rush for oil and light when the midnight is upon us—but of an everlasting growth; and by the Grace of God on unambitious faithfulness, on pure and gentle love, keeping to its own path though it must pass through all the strait gates and take up all the crosses by the way, the Divine likeness comes full at last in those who yet know not the glory that is shining in their face. The fully-inspired man is the last result of long obedience hearkening ever to the voice of His word in us.

And this ought to relieve us from much harassing anxiety about the state and prospects of our souls. If a man seeks his own life, he shall lose it. If we are saved by Love, we cannot be saved by anxiety about our own safety. Do the work, and accept the sorrow that God provides, and be careful for nothing more. Do it, and bear it, and as God lives, and Himself works in us what we ought to do, it has given its contribution to the Kingdom of Heaven, to the blessedness of our Immortality. If only our life is *religious* life, however small the service, however obscure the place, the Father of spirits, who weighs goodness only in qualitative scales, is making us a Kingdom for Himself. We may be watching for the coming of that Kingdom, like the Disciples who would sit on Christ's right hand, too anxious for our own part

in it to be self forgetful, and so removed from the divine charity that does God's work and seeketh not her own—restless and dissatisfied at our tardy growth, impatient of minute toil and thirsting for great things,—depressed, perhaps, at the contrast between high-wrought imaginations and the pale colours of the feeble life that acts and suffers in ourselves—but stand where God has placed you—make, from day to day, a garden of the Lord of whatever wilderness lies around your own contracted steps on earth—do what your hand findeth to do—cherish whatever may cheer and sweeten the hearts that are nearest to you—entertain, though you can do nothing for it but give it a hospitable lodging in your soul, every project of goodness that the Holy Spirit prompts, and the Kingdom which cometh not with Observation is advancing upon you as rapidly as God, who knows you, sees to be safe, as rapidly as is consistent with spiritual foundations, with a solid framework, and imperishable gains of growth.

And in what we call our Civilization there is a process going forward which is preparing the way of the Lord and making his paths straight. Follow out any great line of investigation and it will lead direct to God. Science, Astronomy, Geology, Political Economy, without designing it, were widening the bounds of Revelation itself, freeing the spirit from the letter, when pursuing their own paths of thought. There is no great truth that does not cause some narrow doctrines, and in departments other than its own, to shrink from before it. Some thirty years

ago in England there was an irreligious fear, not that the age was too exclusively practical, for that may have been, but that no spiritual *Good* would come out of science—a distrust that the earnest pursuit of any kind of reality could fail to come at last into contact with God. The intellect of the age, and of the country, was then too much a worshipper in the outer court. But this did not and could not last; all things are of God and lie close together. Science has her mysteries as well as Faith; Social Economy, demonstrate what she may, soon finds that she can achieve nothing without the heart of a brother, without the Spirit of our Father; and now it comes upon us as a new gospel, that the age and the country, through earnestness in great, and apparently independent, directions, have touched the conterminous spiritual land, have reached thoughts with which spiritual narrowness cannot co-exist, have without observation been outgrowing traditional and lifeless systems, and are prepared, instead of Articles of Belief, to find the bright forms of Universal Truth in Nature and in the Bible.

Thirty years ago every preacher of a free Gospel, of the religious fruitfulness of spiritual liberty, had to do battle, as for his life, on behalf of principles that now seem part of the light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world. And if some advances of free Science, as in applied economic truth, have not as yet had their due spiritual results in the elevation of the people, this has been owing to spiritual causes, because, through failure of education, the

minds and souls of the working classes were not morally prepared to use the breathing time that was given.

And if the Kingdom of Heaven is within us, then the blame of losing Heaven falls not on circumstance, but on some failure within. To look anywhere for relief but to righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit, is only to plead that we should be pure if we were not tempted—contented if God did not disappoint us—tender if we were not provoked beyond reasonable bounds—charitable if those who need our charity had not such a multitude of sins to cover. It was in the face of the Tempter, in defiance of his powers, that Christ kept his allegiance, and Angels of Peace ministered unto him.

And whatever may be true of the quick darting of God's light into a soul, or rather in our recognition of the light always there, the Voice of the King heard within us will not at once make us His Kingdom, though it may set us on our onward way. Even of one so pure as Christ we must remember those forty days in the Wilderness and the continual retreats of prayer; of one so noble as Paul, whose conversion was rather to right views of God than to a right Heart, we must remember the retirement of those three years amid the mountains of Arabia. For our type of the Kingdom of Heaven we have him who *grew* in grace and in favour with God and with man, who would not strive nor cry, nor let his voice be heard in the streets. In spiritual things, though we know it not, we "move entirely when we move at all."



In every true act of love or of obedience God is gaining us altogether. The effect of any one service or sacrifice we can no more determine than of any one touch of the pencil or the chisel on the great works of Art. The hand of Genius may labour long and patiently, and to an unskilled observer there is no progress—but an immortal work is growing. Let no one doubt who serves. If he works slowly, let him bethink himself that he is working for Perfection—and love his work, for its own sake, with at least as earnest a devotion as an Artist would who, filled with some divine conception, has a life beyond the world, and a perpetual joy in the labour that is to give it a glorious though a fleeting form. And here no effort fails : human Genius is not needed, for God is our Inspiration : when we work for a spiritual end it is our Father that worketh in us to will and to do of His own good pleasure. *He* knows where He is leading us ; *we* know whether every step by the way is taken in Faith and Love ; and if so, the hour is at hand when we shall neither say, Lo here ! nor Lo there ! for, behold, our hearts are right with God, and the Father who loves us has come to us to make His abode with us !

## VII.

### The Sin of Omission.

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JAMES iv. 17 :

“To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.”

THE unhappiness of life, apart from the discipline of trial and sorrow which trains to faith and goodness, is the fruit of Sin—of selfishness, disorder, unchastened temper, vicious indulgence, morbid self-esteem. Yet the dwellers in this evil, the workers of this woe, may escape any poignant sense of the guilt they contract or of the misery they create. Nothing is more difficult than to bring a man face to face with his own character, with his own actions and their consequences. We live in strange ignorance of what we are, of the mixed motives that deform us, the self-regard that vitiates our purest ambition, the streaks of imperfection that cloud with baser matter the transparency of our love and dull its power ; of the impressions of ourselves we leave on other hearts, the shadows we cast, the joys we restrain, the virtues we injure, the passions we inflame, the burdens or the weariness, the soreness or irritations we occasion. We are sinning ; producing

the fruits, casting the shade or blight of sin ; our path is often as the trail of the serpent, whilst no self-knowledge holds the mirror up to nature and shows us the image of ourselves.

Is this an overcharged statement? Put it, then, to a very simple test. How small a part of a man's life, of the full use and enjoyment of his being, consists in the abundance of the things that he possesseth—of those things, at least, which the world can give or take away ; for the great, universal gifts of God, the dower of nature and of grace, are not to be confounded with conditional or perishable property ! How little would suffice for the blessedness of home-life if hearts and minds were kindled by high interests proper to themselves ; the recurring days devoted to pursuits that could never be deprived of healthy opportunity or of the sense of God's favouring blessing ; and the sources of all the wounds inflicted by the uneasiness of moral discontent closed up by fellowship in the self-forgetting cheerfulness of earnest occupation ! What precious blessings of Almighty God within the dwellings of this land are daily lost, or turned to poison, through the want of adequate pursuits to elevate and tone the character, or, short of this, from the want of a loving spirit of direction and self-government in the ordered conduct of a just life ! Almost everywhere may we see collected the materials of blessedness, wanting only the pure and constant flow of spiritual purpose and endeavour to maintain the regulated glow of growing life. If we could distinctly see what the causes are which dis-

appoint the hopes with which God ever warms the heart of inexperience, we might stand aghast at the sacrifice of His richest opportunities from the absence of the most elementary principles of Christ's spirit and estimate of life. Self-engrossment blinds the fine faculty of moral observation; we see not what is passing around us; other hearts, wills, and wants might be extinguished, so rudely are they dealt with, so heedlessly do we pursue our own way, little knowing what mischief we are working, from what love and joy we are banishing ourselves, what fine tissues that better than an armour of proof would have covered and protected us against the calamities of fortune we are painfully rending, the danger we incur of being felt as a foreign substance in unbearable contact with the acutest sensibilities of another's life. What lies at the root of the resulting wounds and estrangements, the abounding resentments and bitterness? Self-will, a want of that rudiment of Christ's spirit which would compel a man to lift his eyes off himself, and live too much within the hearts and lives of others to petrify their sympathies or trample on their rights. When the band of tender respect falls away, and individual inclination rules, out of that hardness and wilfulness come the intensest disappointments, and, as the corruption of what is best is ever the worst, family life that is not mutual life, that has its forms but not its spirit, its bonds and powers and familiar privileges but not its love, becomes the most effectual of all means for wounding and withering the heart. There is a Greek proverb: "What can

a man drink if water chokes him ?” What can purify and soften a man’s nature if the life of his home affections makes him inconsiderate, selfish and wilful, overbearing and hard ? And often, where there is no habitual insensibility, an unguarded weakness, an ungoverned impulse, a moment’s passion, can violate the peace of others or stain them with dishonour. Anger will give a voice to carnal instinct ; appetite seize the offered draught of guilty pleasure ; sloth and self-indulgence relax the law and order of moral well-being ; yet when the natural disasters follow—broken confidence, with all the agonized and disturbed relations of hearts in which the tie of esteem and trust is loosed—they will be distributed among numberless circumstances, and the fact evaded that they are directly chargeable on personal Sin.

How is it that we can sow the seeds of manifold failure and loss of peace, and yet when the retributions come not recognize that we are reaping our own harvest ? We disorder our tempers, and go forth amidst earth and sky, and our spiritual nature is so jarred that the works of God are no longer a medium of communication between us and Him, and yet we can escape the knowledge that it is our Sin that has deranged us. We forfeit the security of the sweet intercourses of life, and complain of the inconstancy of friendships we had selfishly abused. We fall behind in work and duty, and go into society with heavy arrears upon our hearts, and find it stale, flat, and unprofitable, without discerning that the deadness is the oppression of an unelastic spirit, our



weariness the shadow of a sinful burden. The causes which betray a man into Sin enable him to avoid the distinct imputation of its consequences to himself in the self-regard, the occupation with our own wills and ways, which becomes insensible to the claims of men and the offered opportunities of God. All Sin is of the nature of an intense selfishness, a wayward indulgence of personal inclination; and the more selfish a man is the less does he know that he is so. It banishes God from remembrance, shuts out His fellowship, dares to do without His present love, and cancels His former mercies. God within the soul, and God the Lawgiver, the soliciting Father, the righteous Avenger, with all His spiritual and eternal relations to our being, is for the time extinguished. It ignores, rather than knowingly violates, the claims and rights of others; hears not, sees not, the anguished pleadings, the imploring looks of those whose bosoms it will pierce like a sword; the self-concentration of indulgence becomes our normal state, and in the most obvious retributions we can see misfortunes, hardships, wrongs to win for us consideration from others, rather than condemnation on ourselves.

This tendency of Sin, to be blind to its own consequences, to know them not as its own fruits, is promoted by the evil influences it exerts in disturbing and alienating the hearts of others, so that hardly can the purest stand in sinless relations to Sin when drawn into close intercourse with it. Our Sin cools love, awakens natural resentments, makes confidence or genial intercourse almost an impossibility to sensitive

natures, and in the wretched complications that ensue the self-concentration at the root of sinful indulgence will readily glide into the impression that it is unjustly used, and more sinned against than sinning. And thus the sin of one, out of the weakness or inaptitude of others, partly because they want love and patience to bear with it, partly because they want wisdom to deal with it, will produce a whole harvest of sins, and enflame all the unhappy elements lurking in unchastened natures. But torpid and callous must be the conscience that turns the resentful misery it evokes into a plea of self-justification, instead of discerning in it the most awful aggravation of sin. It must needs be that offences come, but woe be to that man by whom they come! For it also must needs be that while the originating selfishness of sin endures, the offences it provokes will hide from it the discernment of itself. Troubled waters reflect no image; and it is only when looking into the sorrowing face of patient love that hard or passionate self-will is startled and punctured by the contrast.

The extent to which we all succeed in banishing the consciousness of Sin, our escape from any distinct feeling of God's disapprobation, ignorance of ourselves as violators of the first law of spiritual beings, in leaving known evils unremoved, in turning from the pursuit of that measure of good which the eternal Spirit has brought within our knowledge, demonstrate the torpor and inaction of our souls. That we suffer so little from the sense of sin, that we can be so free from unawed introspection of this sort, is surely

alarming proof of how utterly we can forget the only ends for which our existence was bestowed, and be unconscious of personal relations to Him in whom we live. For what is the implied condition of our being, on any view that does not destroy the connection of our nature with God? Is it not that we strive to retain within our spiritual frames, to unfold and represent in the actions of our lives, that measure of moral perfectness which the Source of Good has brought clearly to the knowledge of our souls? To extinguish Sin within ourselves, to be drawn into inward and practical co-operation with the holy blessedness God's providence is aiming to produce, the reign of love and knowledge, of goodness and beauty, of spiritual law and truth in the hidden parts, —it is impossible for any one not an atheist, nor a fatalistic sensualist, to conceive that life was given for other purposes. Yet, how can we stand before Heaven, in the light of this thought, and not be weighed down under the consciousness of an abused existence, and pierced through by the awe of God! Christianity, which always gives distinct expression to the holiest thought of the human heart, and encourages it to come forth by showing it realized in the life of the Son of Man, expressly declares that to aid us in the great aim of the extinction of Sin, and assimilation to our Father, was the one object of the Saviour's mission: "Ye know that he was manifested to take away Sin; whosoever abideth in him sinneth not." Yet Sin is the most common experience any of us know, aggravated by the consciousness that,

so little are our hearts set on its extinction and the incarnation of the Divine Word in ourselves, so little is God's only object in our lives the first object in our thoughts—the pain occasioned by the recognized stings of Sin makes an inappreciable part of the vast sum of human wretchedness. I do not mean that we do not suffer from the consequences of our Sins—that we do daily, hourly, unintermittingly—but for the Sins themselves, regarded as our own spiritual degradation and unmaking, we consciously suffer very little. We are weary, restless, unstrung, dissatisfied with our position in the world, our reputation with men—with that jaded sense of the worthlessness and disappointment of life which must cling to those who are without the peace of God which passeth understanding; but though it is impossible not to see everywhere the unmistakable marks of this kind of suffering, it is also impossible to deny that, for the most part, we lose their spiritual significance, and fail to see in our general unhingement and distress the measure and retribution of our sins. I am excluding now those paroxysms of remorse which come to us in critical periods, in seasons of overwhelming conviction, when it is no longer possible to evade the knowledge of what we are, when our spiritual being must make an effort to recover itself through throes of shame and agony, or sink into insensibility for ever. It is well when even these life struggles are not more coloured by the bitterness of exposure to human consequences, by wounded self-regard, than by the consciousness of our spiritual degradation, of

the sinful relations of our souls to a holy God who had poured His light into us, and offered us strength and grace, so that we sinned against knowledge and without excuse. It is well if that terrible convulsion of convicted conscience is even then only the godly sorrow that worketh repentance to salvation, without admixture of the sorrow of the world that worketh only human shame and deeper death. The writhings of our sufferings when, like a worm, we are uncovered and refugeless in the eyes of men are not to be mistaken for the utter woe of contrition which the awakened soul would not have other than it is, thankful in its deepest humiliation that the hour of revulsion has arrived, and that no more it can escape, or desires to escape, the searching eye of God.

That we have no experience of this violent effort of the spiritual nature to save itself from destruction, may only show that we have not yet reached the crisis when God must interpose to restore the lost balance of our being, by means of a sudden and spasmodic life communicated to one or more of its perishing powers. Far short of this, our own souls ought to be continually interposing, making it impossible for us to ignore the approaches of Sin, or so to walk aside from God as to feel not the searchings of His eye, the requirements of His spirit. For what is Sin? It is not to be confused with the gross acts of wrongdoing by which guilt is contracted; it is not to be confounded with crime. To commit no legal wrong may carry acquittal before Man: to neglect a prompting of the Divine spirit is condemnation before God.



“To him who knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is Sin.” Which of us can meet this test? Who orders his life according to this rule? Who distributes his time in obedience to this law? Who expends his means, that portion of them which he holds himself free to spend, and does spend, on things not necessities, according to the suggestions of this spirit? How much of obvious good do we all know, to which we contribute nothing of effort, sacrifice, prayer, or thought, to bring it forth into life and being! How many gracious and, in this suffering world, most needful things has God’s spirit suggested to our hearts as good, holy, and useful, things that clearly ought to be done, and yet the suggestion received no entertainment from our souls; we turned to our own ways and dismissed it to forgetfulness! How much do we know that would be good—good for our own souls, good for those near to us as our own souls, good for the world—which, being within our power, we yet neither do, nor mean to do! Nor does our Sin stop here. We not only refuse, neglect, to do the good which God makes known to us; we do the opposing evil. We know the power of meekness, and indulge in what we call just resentments. We know that in the sight of God there is no respect of persons, and indulge in pride of place. We know that only the pure in heart attain to spiritual discernment, and suffuse the soul with thick clouds of worldliness and sense. The easy way in which certain reputations are gained shows how lightly some faults are estimated, with what a low sense of duty some actions

are overpraised. What so great thing would it be, for instance, if, in this perishing world into which we brought nothing, out of which we take nothing, in the matter of liberality men were to act up to the fulness of what they know could not but promote objects that are dear to God? Would it be any remarkable virtue for a man who knows that only his soul is immortal, not to care, in comparison with well-doing, for accumulations, luxuries, trappings, costly furnishings,—and having food and raiment therewith to be content? It is vain to plead that there is uncertainty as to the means of doing good, and a possibility of doing evil. It is not always this that stints our beneficence. How little obtains for a man the reputation of generosity, when in the estimation of Him who gave the talents, and assigned their stewardship, he may be hiding, or appropriating, his Lord's money! There was an age of Christianity when a man would make some mighty sacrifice, build a Cathedral for instance, as an offering for his soul. That was in times when great Sins sought great atonements; but perhaps now there is many an accumulation of mean and creeping sins that amass as large a sum of wretchedness and evil, and yet awaken no sense of the necessity of seeking a reconciliation with God. It is true that such sacrifices had their roots in personal fear; but why should not the love of God and man, and of all things good, produce as large offerings as the wretched fears of superstitious guilt bargaining for its own salvation? And how are men free from Sin if, knowing the great interests of God that need their aid, knowing the

perishable and the imperishable uses of earthly things, they will not do as much out of sympathy with the spirit of our Father, out of pure love for the ends that are dear to His providence, as did the self-seeking devotees of another age as a compensation for their sins, and a protection against their Judge? In an age of violence, of unrestrained passions, the terrors of religion exacted fearful penalties of a material kind from great offenders. In an age of order, when there are no offences that the law does not punish, and religion wrings no vast tributes from remorse, how can it be accounted for, except through prevailing sinfulness, low preferences, wilful blindness to spiritual interests, that in the extent of individual sacrifices for human well-being, and of self-immolation before God, Christianity so seldom wins from love what superstition drew from fear? We all know the good we might do, and do not: yet we are not much burdened by the weight of sin, nor feel the eye of God reproachfully upon us. How can this be? How can we live in Sin, knowing what is good to be done and doing it not, and escape remorse? How, in our sins of omission, can we refuse to God's universal love the good He suggests to our hearts, and looks for from our hands, and yet lead the easy lives we do, unhaunted by the thought that the Eternal Spirit sees so little in us that He can desire?

There is but one explanation, the deep and awful one, that we escape the sense of Sin by escaping the sense of God. "He is not in all our thoughts." "We live without Him in the world." His fellowship,

the light of His countenance, is not our prime necessity. We are familiar with the phrase, not with the power, of "communion with His holy spirit." Even in our prayers we feel Him not directly, we see Him not as He is. We can speak to Him aside, and never so hold our souls to meet the intense gaze of His spirit that we could not remain in ignorance of what we are in the sight of the Holy One. Oh! nothing is easier than to keep all the forms of religion, to pray twice a day, and to deceive our own hearts, never really meeting the eye of God, or baring our souls to His inspection. Doubtless the first effect of any true searching of His spirit, if we look into the face of the infinitely Holy One with a pure desire to know and to be known, must be a knowledge of our own evil; this is inevitably the first conviction of a living soul in intercourse with God; but, if as we learn to know our sins we learn to hate them, and if they are revealed to us by the light of our Father's countenance gazing into us that will certainly be the case, then shall we come to love what He loves, and to abhor what He abhors, else could we not continue to meet His look, and must shrink from His eye; and so, as the fruits of any real fellowship with Him, all wilful disobedience and estrangement must of necessity be disappearing, however long may adhere to us the imperfections of our frailty.

This is ever the office of the Comforter, to convince of Sin, of Righteousness, and of Judgment. If we have God in our thoughts we must keep His commandments and work out His promptings. If we

quench His spirit we cannot bear to look into His face, and are compelled to turn aside and forget Him. Christ's law of Discipleship was derived from the law of his own Sonship, "If a man love me he will keep my words, and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him."



## VIII.

### Conversion.

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ACTS iii. 19 :

“Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord.”

PSALM li. 10 :

“Create in me a clean heart, O God :  
And renew a right spirit within me.”

Is it possible for great and radical changes to take place in Character—changes so affecting the fountain of a man's nature that, of its own accord, it will now send forth sweet water instead of bitter? Is it possible for a new spirit to enter into a man, displacing the most deep-seated types of feeling and action, as the gushing of a clear spring will remove the foulest things that have gathered over it? Is regeneration of Life within the compass of spiritual influence? Is Religion a Counsellor for the prudent, and a Mentor for the good, but with no redemptive power for the bad? Is it extravagant, or against experience, to believe that there may be a mighty action of God

within the soul, giving the knowledge of Sin, and at the same time such assurance of Divine love and power, as will transform all the relations of the sinner to his God, and all the inclinations of his Heart? Is Christianity and the Christian Church only as a Sanitary Commission with preventive measures for the healthy, but incapable of delivering the plague-stricken? Can we only guard the door against the unclean spirits, and are helpless to cast them out, once they have entered in and taken possession? Is it vain to look for entire revolutions of soul—for the self-indulgent to become the self-denying—for the sensual and impure to live on heavenly food—for the worldly to discover the true riches—for the hard-hearted to be so melted by the fire of Divine Love as to grieve all their days at the remembrances of unnatural feeling—for the proud to have their eyes opened to their real place before God and Man—for the rebellious and the despisers to be overcome by Him who through all rebellion, and all scorn, sheds down silent Grace, and causes His sun to shine, and His rain to fall, upon the evil and upon the good? Must it be once bad, always bad? once brutal, always brutal? once bitter, always bitter? once mean, always mean? once false, always false? once a prey to vile passions, to envy, spite, jealousy, vindictiveness, steeped in them for ever? Is there no power in Religion to alter all this? If not, then Religion brings us into no contact with Him to whom all things are possible, and nature and habit hold us helpless.

It will not serve to answer such questions as these by scriptural quotations—"Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots?" Other quotations exhibiting both the possibility and the fact of entire conversion are ready at hand, leaving untouched the truth contained in the first, that the change is as great as though the leopard were to lie down with the lamb and take its clothing; or the mysterious conditions on which colour depends were suddenly to efface the distinction between an Ethiopian and a Circassian. The vastness of the change is not in question, nor its mystery either—if by mystery is meant that it lies beyond the reach of human power, or of human understanding; but neither vastness nor mystery are inconsistent with probability or fact. No change, moreover, is desired either in the Ethiopian or in the leopard, for everything is good according to its kind. There will always be complexional types of character, which can no more be altered than the Races of men. There are the two great moral types of the contemplative and the active form of man, each good in its kind, depending upon differences of original make, which may be modified and have their proportions largely altered by culture, but which never can be and never were intended to be obliterated. There is no such thing as either one quantitative or one qualitative measure, for mental and physical properties to meet and mingle in the human being. The absolute perfection of man may depend upon such proportions—but the relative perfection of the Individual depends upon no such unattainable thing, but simply on the

spirit that animates and sways the forces given to him, such as they are. It would be monstrous to dream of a uniformity, a mingling of elements, a disappearance of the differences between Newton and Washington, Shakespere and Cromwell. And besides the healthy complexional varieties which are of the utmost value to human progress—for what could men all the same contribute, or what stimulus apply, to one another?—*there are* constitutional imperfections, such as natural debility, weakness of fibre, deficiency of animal spirits, slowness of understanding, which are not subjects for a moral change, and which though they modify, and no doubt limit, the *form* of soul and life, the direction and the range of power, may yet in inward purpose be of the grandest elevation, swayed by the spirit of a martyr or a saint. Conversion, then, must not be tested by cases of complexional variety, nor by cases of constitutional defect. It cannot alter such types as these; it can only deal with the ruling spirit that disposes of the forces of a man's nature, be those forces what they may; it cannot make a man different from what God made him, but it can make him all that God intended him to be; it cannot add a single element to his nature, but it can introduce peace into the midst of them, and make God their Ruler, instead of selfishness or passion. Conversion does not mean perfection; it means that such forces as a man has shall be directed by a spirit of order, aspiration, purity, and sweetness.

Conversions have fallen under the observation of

us all, if we have had eyes to see them, to an extent sufficient to give us faith even in the strongest cases. Begin with the most intelligible forms in which you can trace the influences at work, and ascend to those in which all investigation ends in the personal action of God.

It has happened to most persons to see a member of a family in early life, it may be of fine powers, and with no unamiable dispositions, all untuned and jarred, wrong with every one, gloomy, captious, contradictory, finding in everything a rock of offence. Some spirit, not necessarily an evil one, has entered into the waters and troubled them. It may be the first feeling of personal freedom and responsibility, not easily adapting itself to the small bondage of domestic rules too long continued; it may be the restlessness of desire at that period of life when the ideal nature is all at work, and as there are no practical duties to hold it down, it lives in Dreamland, and is thrown out of harmony with the actual; it may be affection and faculty beyond the measure of the food and occupation provided for them, and instinctively craving; it may be a sense of injustice, and wounded self-respect, a jealousy of interference, a fretting under authority, if sphere, and freedom, and place in the family, do not keep pace with conscious growth; and no doubt it may be self-will, and arrogance, the superiority of inexperience not to be harshly judged, largely mingling with all these. This is the diagnosis of the case: not a very alarming one; and yet if you were to judge of it by the out-



ward symptoms, by the haggard, self-occupied look, the moody restlessness, the gloomy, fitful abstraction, the wild irritability, the half-sullen half-savage independence, you might take it to represent a case of demoniacal possession. Here assuredly there are elements of danger—with some natures elements of insanity—and a Conversion is urgently needed. What is to effect it? Gently to let slip the yoke of authority so that self-love may not needlessly gall against it: the removal, imperceptibly if possible, of the restrictions that belonged to earlier years, and are natural grounds of offence; a growing respect, deference, and courtesy—not the indulgence shown to a child, but something of the consideration shown to an equal; for older people often commit great injustice, and great rudeness, and through their incapacity to understand the moral elements before them, put down what they call self-will with a very coarse self-will of their own;—and if in addition to this mere removal of the roots of bitterness, something of earnest sympathy could be supplied by one who, without any condescension, was yet felt to raise the uneasy spirit to a level somewhat higher than its own, the lost balance may be restored, freedom, ease, and sweetness recovered, and the whole character transformed by causes as natural, though of a far higher order, as when the evil spirit departed from Saul when David touched the harp.

There is again the class of Conversions produced by human, intelligible influences not involving the mysterious action of God, when some strong and

sweet affection turns all currents into its own channel, and is powerful enough to occupy the whole nature with itself and with the duties that grow out of it, quelling at once the habits or passions that are unworthy of it, with the misery and self-torture that belonged to an objectless condition. A fountain of purity, and a fountain of peace, are opened together. The man has now a life out of himself, and by losing has found himself, so impossible is it for any one to be the centre of his own existence, to be held by no holy tie out of himself without hardening into miserable selfishness, or going off into wild irregularity. Conversions of this kind are widely different in their circumstances, and in the nature of the influence exerted, having only this common feature, that one mind has become the master spring of another, not necessarily its superior, but supplying to it something that before it needed, and that now preserves it from objectless disorder, the delicate or mysterious bond that holds the faculties together, and saves from the worst of all dangers, a looseness of existence. Not dissimilar to these are the Conversions that take place when a man has found his calling, and becomes engaged in a pursuit, that whilst it has the zest of a passion, is also large enough, and arduous enough, to occupy all his nature. For this is essential in any Conversion that is to be permanent; it must not only change the order of the affections, introducing a new spirit into the midst of them, it must also provide a life, a sphere, an occupation. It is not enough that the House is empty,

swept, and garnished ; it must be filled with good angels, not a chamber of it left vacant, nor long deserted by its rightful tenants, else the evil spirits will return to it again. It is this that makes momentary Conversion so easy, effectual Conversion so rare, when produced by foreign influence, as by the action of one mind upon another, if the regenerating mind cannot become the centre of the other's life. It is not difficult to introduce flashes of light into a darkened mind, or a ray of reason into a disordered one, nor a strong gushing of sweetness and purity into a corrupted one, along with vehement desires that the new, strange feelings, so fresh and cleansing, should continue for ever ; but no affection can endure except by producing its own works and living on its own fruits ; and if it has no fruits, no works, no absorbing life, no career,—if you cannot take the changed heart and give it corresponding occupation,—there is nothing to sustain the new emotions, and the old life returns, even as the gloom gathered again on Saul's dark spirit when David's harp was stilled. There is nothing so disappointing, and in the end perhaps so debilitating to the subjects of them, as these repeated shocks of spiritual action, that lead to nothing. It is like galvanizing the dead ; they fall back into insensibility, or rather the real state, and the apparent state, become once more the same. And this is the weak side of all intermittent spiritual influence, indeed, of the Christian Church. You can send the thrill of a new life through a soul—that is not difficult—but where is the sphere, the

work, the full, eager, and ardent career that is for ever to sustain it? You have swept it for a moment with a strong wind; but the old covering mantles again the standing water. Those eras that have been conspicuous for great and effectual Conversions have always been marked by this, that the Conversion opened a way to the Life that was at once its fruit and its nourishment. The cry for repentance, and for works meet for repentance, came together, as when Christ made apostles of his converts; or at a period of the deepest religious torpor that ever benumbed this country, Wesley sent his penitents to carry the new life that was burning in them to those still dead in trespasses and sins. It is far other, and less noble work, that indeed soon ceases to have any nobleness in it, and often looks very awful in its mimicry and hollowness, to awaken feelings that have no career, and no issues; to produce transient conversions in passive listeners, and excite emotions that work off their strength upon themselves. It may be greatly doubted, on this account, whether the Christian Church, in so far as it is itself alive at all, is not in large measure an organized system for producing spiritual debility and exhaustion. And this will ever make a man who reverences Reality, and who fears the swoln guise of it beyond any other fear whatever, more anxious to speak a word of earnest principle that may take application and clothe itself with life, than to awaken storms or floods of passion that flow off into no river of life, that have no field of healthy action in toil and

sacrifice—but die where they were born, until stirred again by foreign influence in the heart they convulse and weaken with a mimic fight. Any earnest purpose, any pure inclination, that carries its occupation and life with it, even though directly it had no religious bearing, and originated in no religious impulse, is far beyond all this as a real agent in Conversion. I have known a man's whole nature and character absolutely transfigured, and in a time wonderfully short, by suddenly developing a taste, and at no early period of life, for one difficult and obscure branch of Natural History. He had, before, all the marks upon him of constitutional debility, and though pure and negatively blameless, he was physically and spiritually perishing under a conscientiousness that was not, and could not be, satisfied with the feeble work, and the feeble fruits of it, to which alone he could attain in the profession, it was that of a minister of Religion, to which he belonged. When this new Life opened upon him, and he discovered his aptitude for it, and the honour that might attend him in it, the spiritual honour that ever waits upon real work faithfully done, it would be no figure of speech to say that he was regenerated. He became laborious, ardent, and full of perpetual joy; his weakness vanished; his whole bearing changed and he became a man manifestly dignified and ennobled by the happiness of useful work, by unconscious self-respect, and by overflowing gratitude to God who had at last called him to serve where service found continual inspiration and delight. It



is on this account that there is no nobler promise for character than when a strong passion for some one study or pursuit takes possession of a man's nature, if it is a pursuit, as indeed every pursuit is that is really important to the world, worthy of an exalted love, and providing inexhaustible materials for labour and for thought. And there is no sign so sure of a pervading weakness, of a nature from which great endeavours are not likely to come, as the absence of such determining tastes, or the suppression of their feeble appearances under the opportunities of self-indulgence.

There is another class of Conversions which do involve the personal action of God, and not only lead to Him but begin with Him, yet which are so little mysterious in their nature, and of such large and amply tested occurrence, that they will be universally admitted cases of spiritual Power. I mean those cases in which the sense of God comes for the first time upon those who have been living without Him in the world. I mean the case of rude, brutal, uncivilized men, leading the life of nature, abandoned to themselves, following their appetites, given up to self-indulgence, ungoverned, unrestrained—but not mean, not false, not cowardly, not inwardly twisted and crooked by the odious vices of the class that prey upon civilized man—not living upon craft or dishonesty, upon hypocrisy, upon fraudulent beggary, if enjoying like animals yet working like men, shrinking from no labour, and honestly earning what they spend—spend it as they may. These are cases in

which often it would be hard to say that the men were sinful ; evil and debased they are, but it would be scarcely true to say that they were acting against their Light, against any inward Voice that spoke clear words to them. They have been drifted away from the spiritual to the carnal, by circumstances not by Will, so that they appear absolutely free from any kind of spiritual conflict ; Conscience and God make no remonstrances with them. Now for the first time let them be pricked to the Heart, let a part of their nature be addressed that never was spoken to before, let a direct appeal be made to that sense of God which it is impossible finally to separate from the awful elements of human nature, of being and of death, of affection and of nothingness, of love and the anguish of love, of fear and hope,—and let Him appear not in menace but in invitation, not in wrath but in compassion, not condemning them but seeking them, and the new Life sets in like a flood, so that for a time the balance of the faculties is overpowered, and strong men, under the inadequacy of their customary understanding to deal with these strange experiences, agonize and faint under the new emotions of their souls. And it would show a very superficial acquaintance with the nature of these cases if we were to infer, either from its suddenness or from its violence, that the change could not be permanent. They are the subjects of a new experience which, once opened to them, may continue open for ever ; a new Life has really entered into them, and as spiritual influence is of incalculable and unlimited

power, the life of the senses and the instincts, into which they can never sink again without a conflict, may have utterly exhausted its interest for beings so deeply and so strangely moved. There is no reason to despair that a strong current of spiritual Life may at any time set in upon those who from force of circumstance are living without God in the world, or that when they are ripe to receive it God will send forth His ministers and His Spirit. These things do not depend upon accident; Nature herself comes to a crisis; wrong ways of life become at last emptied of every zest, and in the weariness and hopelessness, the sense of worthlessness and wretchedness that ensue, preparation for a change has taken place, and the craving is awakened which is the opportunity of God. The first Christian Conversions were manifestly of this nature. Multitudes were weary of a worn-out existence, in which not an element of freshness remained; and whilst pining in the midst of deadness, the new breath of the Gospel, of a Religion of love, grace, holiness, of universal pardon and of absorbing enterprise, passed over them like the creative spirit of God. The new life may spring out of the death of the old one. *We* are not in circumstances perhaps readily to understand this. Christianity is not to us a new influence, and though we may have never felt its power, which with most of us is really the case, we have yet spoiled it by emotionless familiarity, and deadened the edge of the sword by habitual handling. Christianity is to most of us like a school classic, supposed to be well known, but never

at any time vividly received, now farther removed from living apprehension than if we had never known it at all, and capable of being truly imprinted upon us only at some critical time when inward and outward opportunity shall be made to coalesce, when the spirit moved to its depths by trial or by suffering becomes conscious of its wants, and God bears in upon us the revelation of His grace. For this is ever the immediate Power in Conversion, a real feeling of the Spirit of God working in us, a real gaze into the face of God looking at us. If that is attained, there is nothing in the spiritual world that is not open to us.

Though we have only arrived, as it were, at the more intricate cases of Conversion, it will not be denied that if a real feeling of God could enter into a soul, whatever its former state, there would be no limit to the spiritual changes that might take place within it, and no after mystery in the process. All real Conversions must take place in this way, whether they be Conversions from Sin, or from great and misleading Error: *the Heavenly Spirit must look in upon the soul*, and the soul must see Him as He is. The Conversion of St. Paul was in this way. A God whom before he did not know was all at once revealed to him. He looked for the first time into the face of a God who loved the Gentiles, and was the Father of every spirit, and all his old life fell away at once. Everything else in him remained the same; his purposes had all been righteous, his faculties trained and obedient, his whole nature fired

with zeal, the Honour of God the sole spring of his life ; nothing of all this is altered, but the true God is made known to him, he sees Him in His Image and takes its print, and at once, and for ever, all is changed, fanaticism melts into universal Love, the Jewish zealot pours the glowing ore of his nature into the moulds of a Christian man.

Here, then, is the one great question, whether we are seeking our own Conversion, or of some one of the strayed and lost, or of a world lying in wickedness. At whatever stage we are of the spiritual life, here is the Power that is capable of supplying an influence as new, as mighty, as transforming, as if for the first time it was calling us from the dead. But how are we to bring this Power into operation ? How are we for ourselves really to look into God's face ? There is no limit to the Conversions that might take place in us if we saw God as He is, nay, if we brought our souls to meet Him as we know Him to be. This is the real inquiry. How is the living God to look in upon our souls, so that the whole fatherly Spirit, quickening Grace, perfect Holiness, measureless Compassion, may act upon us at once, in our consciousness of a living union with Himself ? The more we know ourselves the more we will be ready to confess that this is a way of Life that may be new to us, and that Christianity, the personal communion of God with a human soul, is an experience we may have never steadily known. And if so, what inexhaustible forces of Life are yet in reserve for us ! We may have never felt the action that is to quicken



us for ever. Much interest in Religion, and in religious views, as much interest in Nature, may be different in kind from the personal power of the living God. Here is the fountain of all Life: how are we to reach it, and drink at the Source? Will you say—God does not unveil His face to us; He does not speak to us; as a Person He does not meet us; when we think of Him we are only dealing with our own Thoughts? Is it so? Then, indeed, we do not know Him, and have never been under the power of His Spirit. But it is not so. God does bring us into contact with Himself personally. We all have momentarily known that we have had to deal with a spirit that was not our own, with an invisible presence, an inaudible voice, that could not be more real if the presence assumed a form, and the voice a sound. Only remember, that effectual Conversion is not unconditional. God is willing ever. God is seeking ever. The light is ever shining towards us, if we will keep the eyes and the souls it has once touched steadily fixed upon it. We may turn towards it, and walk ever in the light of God's countenance. We may turn from it, and walk in our own shadows. Nothing is wanting for perpetual regenerations, to renew our strength, and mount as eagles, but to have "Christ formed within us," and with desiring eyes to look ever "into the face of our Father who is in Heaven."

## IX.

### Love, the fulfilling of the Law.

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I COR. xiii. 4-7 :

“Charity suffereth long, and is kind ; charity envieth not ; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil ; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth ; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.”

THERE is a grand simplicity in thus referring all Christian graces to one source,—in cutting short the whole train of philosophic maxims, of prudential calculations and artificial restraints by which feelings are schooled and conduct adjusted,—and supplying their place by one heart-affection, which, expressing what it is, acting according to its nature, breaks forth into the virtues, as God's sunlight gives all its varied beauty to the world. Next to the character of Christ, Christianity's greatest contribution to GOODNESS was in the distinct revelation of its Source, disclosing the deep fountain in which God is mirrored, and whence issue peace on earth, good will to men, communion with the spirit of the universe. For all Goodness is a form of holy Love ; all hope, all enthusiasm, all *Art*, all ideal life, all self-sacri-

fice, and that out of which self-sacrifice proceeds, all pure devotion, are inspirations of Love, Love of God, Love of Truth, Love of Man, Love of Nature, Love of Heaven and of Heavenly Perfectness.

“ All thoughts, all passions, all delights,  
     Whatever stirs this mortal frame,  
 All are but ministers of Love,  
     And feed his sacred flame.”

Christ knew nothing of that legislative morality which instead of an affection gives a precept ; instead of touching a spring of action lays down a rule ; instead of making the heart overflow with living waters carves and defines the channels in which they are to run. Christ spoke seldom of *how much* men have to do, for there is no measure to Love—but constantly of the living spring, constantly of that fulness and richness, and purity of heart which is the well of water springing up into everlasting Life. And would that we thought less of “what is in the bond,” less of measuring our requirements, less of defining duties, and performing tasks,—and more of awakening the perceptions, of feeding the desires, of enriching the affections which would give us a share in the spirit and principle of goodness, make our own nature an original fountain of things merciful and lovely, take us into God’s fellowship, and render our pursuit of beneficence and all perfection as the daily craving and satisfying of our soul’s hunger and thirst ! “ With the heart men believe unto righteousness.”

It need not alarm the jealousy of Reason that the heart is the source of goodness—for *Intellect* is the

great minister and benefactor of the spiritual nature, and if Reason requires to be purified and directed by the moral feelings it repays the service by light and guidance amid perplexing and embarrassing appearances, in opening channels of beneficence, in framing instruments of action, in showing goodness the practical ways to her own ends. It is indeed a fatal injury to our Nature to touch its simple and vigorous integrity, to parcel it out into contrasted or disconnected faculties—to suppose that they act separately and that the strength of one is the weakness of the other—that a man of emotion must want prudence—a man of imagination be defective in observation or in judgment—instead of combining all to furnish the full of Image of God their Giver, receiving its own supply of service from each of the contributories of spirit and of life. It is mainly the business of reason to confirm and direct moral truth: it is the office of the heart to receive it purely from God its fountain, to suggest it by a divining light, and always so to love and cherish it, that it bears its full fruit in the warm culture it receives. In the region of spiritual life the heart anticipates truth, projects it from itself; and even in physical inquiry the competent imagination seizes a clue and leaps to the theory which is afterwards practically established. The great learners, the great teachers, of God, are those to whom common facts act as suggestions, conveying by a hint the Divine thought, the Divine intent to minds that God has constituted in the image of His own. In all science it is Genius and

Imagination, the suggestive faculties, that first catch a sight of the outlines of truth—and the heart is the genius of goodness, the prophet and forerunner of the Kingdom of God. It is only the faith which comes out of the impulses and fore-reachings of the heart, out of the divine instincts of goodness, that has heavenly powers and works great wonders, or of which Christ would have said, "Blessed art thou, for flesh and blood have not revealed it unto you, but the spirit of my Father." There is a faith which is an act of the understanding and stops there, and that faith is dead—even as the Devils were said to believe in God, and nothing to come of it but trembling. There is a Faith which worketh by Love, the joint product of the affections, the reason, and the soul, when a Divine truth is taken into the interior warmth where the heart muses till the fire burns, and is there clothed with the hues of feeling until it lives before us a visible reality. For what is a truth that is admitted, but not *loved*, not cherished, not detained before the heart and the imagination until it rises to its natural dimensions and assumes its glorious form? It is but a physical fact, bereft of its vitality—no more a quickener of thought, a feeder of hopes, a guide of life, a deliverer from circumstance, than an unwatched star in the midnight Heavens when men are sleeping, which directs no wanderer, and shines unregarded in its cold sphere. It is on this account that the most intellectual are not always the most spiritual, nor the most morally excellent. Faith does not come from intellect—it



comes from affection and emotion and conscience—and in its most real form it is a passionate Love of Goodness. It is not the Truth perceived, but the Truth cherished in the heart, that goes like leaven through the character. The attainment of Truth, and the living power of Truth, may depend upon different parts of our nature. Its spiritual energy for the most part comes from a meditative love, a contemplative act—the internal gazing at a Truth until the soul is full of it—the quiet dwelling upon some picturing of Faith until the inward eye is coloured with its glory, and whoever will not thus *cherish* his Truths may in their trial hour find them dead and barren—and never reach the height of their natural inspiration, with his convictions transfigured into conscientious impulse and will, his whole faith in his Heart, his whole Heart in his Life.

It is in harmony with the directest dictate of our moral Nature, as with the deepest teaching of Revelation, since there is one root of perfection the same in us and in God—for “God is Love, and whosoever loveth dwelleth in God, and God in him ;”—that the Apostle goes direct to the pure heart, kept pure, for all the strength and for all the graces of character, and crowns the queenly head of Christlike Charity with the coronal of all the virtues. We are not now inquiring how this catholic Love, which is in fellowship with God, with all God’s creatures, and with all God’s works, may best be cultivated—though to that inquiry the simple answer would be that every gift of God is best cultivated by honouring it and letting

it live in its natural fruits ; but, supposing its existence, we now desire to discern what is involved in it—how necessarily it generates all the great and all the gracious qualities which exalt or adorn our Nature. And as we notice each of the streams of grace and goodness as it issues from the fountain, by a simple appeal to conscience and to consciousness, by a glance of self-inspection, we discover whether the fountain itself is open and playing in our hearts. If the fruits do not appear—the kindred growths of the tree of Life—the roots must be partially dead. Now Love of God is fellowship with God ; love of Man is fellowship with Man ; love of Nature is fellowship with Nature ; love of Truth is communion with Truth, a keeping close to Reality in thought and life, in word and work.

And, first, as to fellowship with God.

All elevation of Thought, all great Hopes, all Peace that cannot be shaken, all Life that is contented, that can thankfully take the place that is given to it because it rests not on itself, have their ground in our Love for One *in whom we can trust*, whom our conscience acknowledges as the Lord of all Perfectness, and to whom our soul is allied by ties in comparison with which all other relationships are remote and unaffecting. The most beneficent relationship on earth, that of parent to child, is the creation of God ; the Child draws its true Life from the Heavenly Parent. The earthly ties are symbols and shadows of spiritual facts. If man was sufficiently reflective, if there was but meditative depth in our hearts, Love

to God would be irrepressible; duty and effort apart, if we acquainted ourselves with Him our Nature must adore Him, and delight itself in Him. The complaint of God is that men will not reflect, that they will not recognize the spiritual facts, that they will not look into the face of Him with whom they have to do. "The ox knoweth his owner, but Israel will not know; my people will not consider." Spiritually present in us He is the strength of our Hearts in hours whose natural weakness no earthly friend can ever know—which we do not sufficiently understand ourselves to unfold or describe it to another. He holds communion with thoughts that earthly friends cannot satisfy; and meets wants that no earthly friends can touch. Nor could we reflect how all other Love must be traced back to His Love without joining in the Psalm, "Whom have we in Heaven but Thee or who is there on the earth that we should desire in comparison with Thee!" All derived perfections, all human tenderness, all that mysterious sympathy with Nature which in its highest states is not so much the sense of beauty as the sentiment of Eternal Life, are but the signs that God is with us, and in us; that through these expressions of His Spirit we are drawn near and nearer to the very source of Thought and Love, and hence the command to love with the mind, with the heart, with the soul, with the strength of the will, for it requires the union of all these to make Him known, and none of them is exercised without new faithfulness on His part—new increase of Life on ours.

Now this Love, wherever it exists, takes up Christ's words, "Father ! not my will, but Thine !" Discord, or even doubt, beyond the hesitation, the reluctance of nature over which Grace prevails, is destructive of the supposition. Piety is the faith of the soul, from His dealings with our souls, that He whom we love is always good and always right—a boundless Trust adopting as its natural language, "It is the Lord, let Him do what seemeth to Him good." And this necessary effect is of course a test of the Love we have for God. Even in human relations that union totters where moral harmony is broken—where disagreement is a frequent experience—when the uncertain bridge of reconciliation has again and again to be traversed ; and with God, where His Will is known, this moral harmony should be absolute, for His Nature leaves no room for those varying lights of opinion and of sentiment which the frailty and partiality of ours in its purest earthly intercourses both occasions and tolerates, and when directed towards the tender Goodness and severe Righteousness of God, Love is accordance, absolute submission when He speaks His will. Love for God partakes of the unlimited nature of its object—it delights in walking by faith, in yielding without terms ; its natural feeling is, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him."

Now nothing so quickens spiritual discernment, so gives insight into another's mind, even into the mind of God, as a strong movement of the affections. It is sympathy with some leading part of another's

character that gradually opens to us all the depths of his nature. And Love, by thus helping insight, conducts to the most exquisite observance of practical duties. We may witness even in the affections of childhood, much more of the matured mind, the effect of feeling in quickening the perceptive powers, in enabling the seeking eye of Love to read unexpressed wishes as though it glanced directly on the heart, in anticipating even the thoughts when Affection makes a study of its object, thus establishing a spiritual intercourse which is at once emblem, and prophecy, and part-fulfilment of Heaven. Now, suppose this natural operation to take effect in our relationship with Him towards whom we all are children, and how would it serve to unveil to us the hidden things of His Providence—make us quick to discern our Father's Spirit when He works in secret or clothes His Love in trial—to disengage from discipline and life the deep intent with which He would penetrate our souls, and by enabling the hearts of the children to know the great Parent's Mind, incline them to the blessed and duteous service of a full filial homage. For Love of God is more than submission to God, more than resignation or acquiescence—it is the active power of these passive qualities—it is desire for conformity, the aspiration of whatever is kindred in us, the eager approach of our spiritual life towards Him who moves it. There is nothing else in Religion that we can compare with the natural action of the Love of God, it is the one mighty power to which all other powers contribute,



when the same Being draws to Himself unfearing affection and adoring veneration; when the heart that feels itself encircled within a tenderness that is infinite is also touched with deepest awe; and the most joyful confidence, the most reverential obedience, the most aspiring hopes, the heart of a child and the soul of Christ, are nourished and upheld by one Affection, and by one Being. These are the natural fruits of Love for God, and wherever the Will is struggling against Providence, or the soul disquieted, or the spirit slow to understand, or the life turned away from glad aspirings, a Searcher of Hearts might say in those piercing words of scripture, "I know you, that ye have not the Love of God in you."

II. Turn now to the natural workings of Charity in its fellowship with Humanity. Briefly, then, Love seeketh not her own. Inasmuch *as it is* Love it passes from itself to its objects, and lives in the life of others. That is its essence. You could not in any way define it without saying so much. It is *measured* by the efforts it would make, by the self-denial it would practise to confer a blessing; by the strait gates it will force itself through that it may go on the way of its life. Pure love, and willingness to suffer for the sake of what it loves, are commensurate terms. And consequently all true charity must love the light that guides it, and pursue it at whatever cost. As St. Paul expresses it, "It rejoices in the Truth." For, seeking to *bless*, it seeks both the right end and the right means. It is no random adventurer in philan-

thropy ; it is alike earnest and cautious out of its great Love ; knowing how possible it is to work lasting wrong by presumptuous benevolence, it hails every *Truth*, new or old, as the instrument of good, the finger-mark of God. Whoever loves mankind must be a patient seeker after Truth, its incorruptible witness—if need be, its social martyr—knowing that God works by Truth alone.

Yet Charity, though it has the laws and ways of God for guidance and instruments, and moves and works in such high fellowship, is thoroughly simple, equally loving and pursuing its end when the method loses magnificence, and might have no charm for an ambitious philanthropist. There are men who from some other impulse, from an intellectual devotion to truth, an indignant recoil from injustice, a severe rectitude of nature, do good service to the world, but whose philanthropy never condescends, who carry with them no genial heart to make happiness where it can and fertilize the scenery of our daily life. Humanity cannot afford to turn away from any who are willing to bless it in their own way ; but they have much to learn of the spirit of Christ. It is Christian Love to be true to its own nature, to desire to diffuse blessedness how, where, and when it may ; and therefore, when it enters into social intercourse, its sympathies are all awake, its senses are present and exercised, observant of what is passing around it, because its heart is stirring ; it is kind, not easily provoked, and, if needs be, suffers long ; it has no malign inclination, and therefore neither envieth nor thinketh

evil; it has no constrained part to play, but free in its simplicity, the eye that beams on us is unconscious of its own light, and the tones know not their own music. Instead of petty and torturing rules to control the petulance of temper—instead of artificial checks to cover over the evil when the outbreak is imminent—instead of a laboured formalism to preserve the proprieties of outward demeanour, let us have the genuine feeling, the true spring of grace and goodness, and leave it to its freedom; and whenever there is Unkindness in our life—or the bitterness of contempt, that worst poison of all goodness—or even a passing irritation taking too readily the indulgence of expression, let us know that the *Heart* is wrong, that the *Spirit* is for the time unloving, uncharitable; and, commencing the work of reformation there, by chastening and purifying the affections, provide for the life that flows from them.

III. For, lastly, if we look to it in its relations to individual character, Charity, the spirit of fellowship with God, with Nature, and with Humanity, is indeed the Peace that passeth understanding shed abroad in men's hearts. What purity so entire as that which, springing from the love of God, strives to keep itself unspotted, that it may be worthy to have communion with Him; or which disengages itself from all evil that it may be an instrument of His goodness, knowing that the righteous cause of human well-being can be advanced only by righteous men, and that no man of impure heart can truly love his brother. Even Jesus Christ acknowledged the cleansing power of

Charity in aiding the purification of his own spirit. "Father, *for their sakes* I sanctify myself, that they also may be sanctified through the Truth." Can any man contemplate the spreading life of moral influence and not feel the power of that sentiment? "The Love of Christ *constrains* me," says St. Paul. Can any spirit love God and not desire to keep His inward temple holy? Again, what self-forgetfulness can be so perfect as that free Charity which reaches its own end, satisfies its own nature, only when it blesses and finds in the gifts and joys of others the gratification of itself? What spirit so full of faith and hope as that which, searching with an eye of desiring Love the characters of men, is quick to discern the indications of goodness, and in its element when it descries bright aspects in the present, bright promise for the future? Thus springs Christian duty from its fountain-head, various, yet one; and we must keep the heart with all diligence if such are its issues of Life. God is Love; blessedness is Love; Christianity is Love; and Love is the fulfilling of the Law. Is there anything more strange or melancholy than that Theology should be comparatively busy about Opinions and silent about Love?

And there is no mystery in Love. Contemplate God in the character that you know to belong to Him, and the difficulty would be to abstain from Love. If the heart will muse long enough the fire will burn; but if it will not do that, it cannot expect to know the warmth of its own spiritual life. Contemplate Him in Jesus Christ—the human image of Him whom the

Heavens cannot emblem ; contemplate what you know of His Presence in your own being, and ascribe it to *Him* when your spirit is sacred and peaceful, when joy touches any of the chords that He has caused to make sweet music in our hearts, or when trial calls to the higher fellowship of Holiness and Faith. Only keep God in your hearts, and you will keep your hearts in His Love.

Contemplate *Man* in his permanent aspects, invest him with his spiritual attributes, that the meaner forms and degraded conditions of our nature may not teach you to despise it. It would be worth while daily to bestow some moral thoughtfulness, some meditation, for the sake of having a right sentiment towards every man, for the sake of being delivered from the hopelessness or the contempt that more than anything else eats away the life of the soul. Above all, habitually place in this true light those who are nearest to you, those with whose deepest and most heavenly nature you should be in daily communion, lest the springs of whatever is sacred in us should shrink away from conventional intercourse or rude familiarity. Be simple, be direct, in dealing with that inward Life which with each of us is the one reality behind the shows of Things. Are we to know nothing more of the soul, the heart, the divine *fountain* Nature in friend, or wife, or child than of the common world? It was said of old that "those who feared God spoke often one to another." Better to be wanderers on the earth, seeking anywhere the kindred of our spirits, than to live out of all true fellowship



with those whom yet we hourly meet, profaning and losing the uses of our homes.

And, finally, carry this spiritual love into all your intercourse with the universe, that the Presence we contemplate may pass into our being, leaving with us that sense of a holy fellowship which ever comes to him who sees God in Nature, who looks with his spirit through his eyes, and "whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are holy, thinks upon these things," reckons with them as the conditions of life, and gathers them all into himself.

## X.

### The Peace of Trust in God.

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ISAIAH xxvi. 3 :

“Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on Thee :  
because he trusteth in Thee.”

PERFECT peace would be the result of two conditions—a true life, and a filial faith. *On our part*, mainly of the first, for God supplies the last as we will receive it. The responding life preserves and cherishes the inspirations of faith, opens the soul to farther spiritual knowledge ; gives that tension to our nature through which it continues susceptible to the fresh promptings of God. Great spiritual trusts, though we *keep* them by honouring them, are not of our own origination. We do not inspire ourselves ; inspiration meaning an influence from above which we are capable of receiving and holding, but not capable of supplying. A man cannot suddenly exalt his will, and say boldly with corresponding result, “I *will* be filled with divine hope and joy ;” “I *will* from this moment receive the mind of God into my own, and be dark and dispirited no more ;” “I will mingle with men and the universe, and not a direction

from the Almighty Hand, not a breathing of the Almighty Spirit, shall escape me ;” “ I will look out of my mortality into the infinite, and see Christ as my natural elevation, and heaven as my natural home.” He might as successfully say, “ I will be a genius ;” “ I will be a prophet ;” “ I will see through all dark problems of individual and social well-being, and become a great regenerator ; my fancy shall throng with images, my mind embrace all truth, my words flow in music.” A man cannot, by willing it, lift himself immediately to intellectual eminence, or to spiritual insight and communion with God.

We can, indeed, in unlimited measure qualify ourselves to reach these elevations, to receive these gifts of the Spirit. Notwithstanding vast differences of original aptitude there is no attribute, or endowment, of our nature, increasing measures of which we may not become fitted to attain ; but by no direct effort of his will can a *mean* man rise at once to sublimity of aim and action, get above the natural atmosphere and suggestions of his character, and breathe at pleasure the peace of God. As well sit in some close city chamber, and say you will breathe mountain air, and feel the exhilarating harmony of your whole being with the transforming ministry of Nature. Mountain air is not to be had but by the mountain side. You may raise your eyes from a distance, and strain your imagination, and exert your will, in vain. Even if lifted by miracle to its summit from your languid seclusion you might not enjoy its mighty magic, and have to shrink from its keenness ; without

accord between the tension of your frame and its thrilling touch you would be no fit instrument for it to play upon. And, so, we must tread the high places of our nature, and be in the frames such exercise imparts, to earn a fresh flush of spiritual joy, take the horizon of faith from our loftier place, meet our God in the access of being, and feel His breath.

And that which by no effort of will can we immediately accomplish for ourselves, by no force of another's will can be accomplished for us, through argument, persuasion, or demonstration of truth. A sick man might as well expect to reach the sensations of health through the oral or printed demonstrations of a great physician, as to reach the peace of God by listening to the lessons and illustrations of a great religious teacher. We may know every law of health, the whole science of disease, the methods and instruments of treatment, the processes of recovery, yet by no operation of this knowledge on our thoughts, of our thoughts on this knowledge, will our nature work right; we cannot think, or will, ourselves into physical energy, the unconscious vigour the blessedness of which no one knows until he has lost it. All sanitary conditions, and all pathology, may lie open to one to whom the grasshopper is a burden. Nay, he may adopt the means of infallible cure, conquer disease, and know no health, that state of life in which the powers work joyfully. To restore nature to the conditions in which health may be maintained is all the physician can accomplish; to regulate the daily life, to develop strength in action, to be in sympathy

with the physical universe without and the spiritual laws within, free from the oppressions which the troubles of the mind, the impurities of the heart, the disorder of affairs inflict upon the body, to keep *it* an unspoiled instrument for the soul, finding all God's works not veils but symbols—in these, without which “there is no health in us,” the physician is helpless—“therein the patient must minister to himself.” It may be that by far the largest part of the bodily sufferings of mankind are not within the province of the medical faculty; that a noble life is the best preservative from paralysis and tortured nerves and all avoidable ills that flesh is heir to. It may be that the mind, not the body, is the great administrator of our disabilities; that the dishonoured spirit avenges itself on the flesh far more than bodily pain or debility, unearned by sin, disorders the spirit; that if not any positive guilt, yet a clinging sense of voluntary defect, a haunting moral discontent, deprives both soul and body of their native element of joy, and does upon us the work of disease. If the physician was wise, and spoke what he saw, his only honest prescription must often be according to the words, “Not so much sick, as troubled by thick coming fancies that keep her from her rest. This disease is beyond my practice.”

And if the physician cannot give our bodies the experiences of health, what can the spiritual physician, the mightiest prophet of God, do for our souls? Can knowledge save us? Alas, most of us are perishing from too much of knowledge—unused and dis-



honoured knowledge. Spiritual debility is not so much from deliberate sinfulness, as in the dreary sense of wasting and hopeless disproportion between our standards and ourselves; or, where there is no such troubled consciousness, which may be a sign of life, from the habitual contemplation of ideals we never aim at realizing, as though we could be saved by erecting crucifixes upon the highways; having, as a luxury for the spiritual imagination, a picture of goodness, a theory of duty, a doctrine of God, our faith in which draws no continual freshness from the colours and experiences, the sacrifices and realities of our own hearts and lives. "We have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin; and have forgotten the exhortation which reasoneth with us as with sons." We are paralyzed by gazing on a greatness towards which we make no movement, demoralized by a goodness which comes without an effort to receive it and goes without an effort to retain it, which commands our passive reverence but lays no impulse on our wills. This is a kind of knowledge that eats away our strength; nor can it long exist in this inoperative condition without our turning it into a merit of its own, founding on it Pharisaic claims, "Lord, I thank Thee that *I* am not as other men"—it may be as other sects,—dwelling with complacency on our inward enlightenment, views, doctrines, contemplations, exalted ideals,—subjecting ourselves to the awful warning, which, alas! there is no one to speak to us,—“The Publicans and Sinners will go into the Kingdom of Heaven before you.” What makes our

common life odious, our inaction a wasting poison, is the co-existing presence in our souls of the divinest ideals of God, for this leads directly to the spiritual pretences and vices, the voluntary, or involuntary, self-deceptions and insincerities, in comparison with which the carnal vices may be but the spontaneous flush of unchastened nature. Not the natural indulgences, the vigorous action of the only element that is alive in the man, which may show not so much that conscience is violated as that conscience is dormant, not so much that God is insulted as that God is unknown, and may leave the great spiritual powers unimpaired to be instruments of redemption on their day of awakening—not these corrupt the heart of nobleness, but the spiritual pretences which grow out of the knowledge of perfection and the choice of evil, which debilitate through a latent sense that the mightiest influences are being spent on us in vain,—or else set up some vile plea of superior refinement and enlightenment as signs of grace and favour, or even make a professed religious humility, painless confessions of being miserable sinners, substitutes for righteousness before the holiness of God, in self-righteous contrast with the ruder and healthier natures which make no such confessions, only because their light is not so far beyond their lives.

The defect of all such knowledge is that it has come to us in a wrong way, that it has fallen on us like manna on the desert rather than grown up within us ; we gaze at it rather than feel it ; we are habituated to the contemplation of it as a theory or a picture,

but have it not as a personal possession. How, for example, will even professedly religious people, when under sorrow, seek for peace? They will seek it from counsel, from books, from instruction, from sympathy. They think that if religion is true, something could be *said* to them that could remove or transfigure their sorrow. They desire that some one will give them a *view* that will tranquilize and charm them by its beauty; an *argument* that will free their souls from unbelief, their conscience from terror. They desire to have the whole case of Religion laid again before them; the ways of God vindicated and illustrated anew; the doctrine of Immortality established afresh on conclusive evidence; the fitting relations of the human spirit to such a God and such a Faith logically deduced from facts and principles; and they think that these demonstrations, if they are true, ought to set their souls in order, that a divine peace ought to settle down upon them, and all unquiet spirits be exorcised by reasoning or by rhetoric,—that in this way they are to know God, and God to acknowledge them. It will not be too much to say, that this is a way in which it is impossible that we should attain to a personal communion with God, a discursive way on which we may be receding from Himself more and more while we are affecting to seek Him. We know God only by the affections which respond to the inspirations of His Spirit, living and growing as divine seeds within us. We trust God, only through our conscious sensibility to the spiritual realities to which, by commending them to *us*, He is

Himself committed. Only the pure in heart *see* Him. Only the merciful *know* that He forgives. It is the portion of His faithfulness and holy love we have personal experience of that inspires our measureless faith, and feeds our undying hope. If we will not rise into some fellowship with God's bountiful nature what can we know of God's compassions, what reliance place upon His whispered promises, how feel the glow of His spirit on our own?

And all the while that the touch of His Spirit is not felt, the divine image not growing in us, our trust in eternal life a languid tradition, we are habituated to the most perfect representations of God and Providence, the loftiest ideals of duty, the serenest visions of immortality. Nothing that can be *said* upon these subjects will now affect our minds with the impulses of fresh knowledge. God, Christ, Heaven, we speak of these with the most placid assurance, but we are not primary witnesses; the roots of our confidence are in other men's testimony rather than in our own souls; we speak what we have heard rather than of what we know. We do not exercise a love in its own nature so self-recompensing, so inexhaustible, as to render it impossible we should doubt the love of Him from whom we receive our own; we have no daily and nightly strivings after a sinless obedience to help us towards Christ with an undiminished hope however oft we fail; we have no pursuits so independent of time and death, so pure in principle, so vast in scope, so concurrent with the mind of God Himself, that it would be easier to believe that

He had not created us than that, having created us, He could break the thread of a life so accordant with His own.

Is it, then, of an excess of spiritual illumination, coming to us from *without*, from external testimony and verbal revelation, that we complain? Is it this that has dwarfed our stature, suppressed natural growth under the overwhelming shadow of this Tree of Knowledge which is not the Tree of Life? Should we have had more of native life in ourselves if God and Christ and Duty, and Immortality, had not been made so familiar to us, in words, from childhood onwards? Even to maintain this would be no paradox, though it would be easy to give it an unfair appearance of paradox. It is no paradox, that childhood's familiarity with God through the hearing of the ear without enough of spiritual experience, of response from the inward witness, may contribute to religious unreality, to dealing with words and counters that were never even the shadows of substances. Alas, for the religious contrasts of the world around us,—the many spiritually lifeless, gorged with food they do not assimilate,—the mass in a state of spiritual inanition from want of nourishment! There was no paradox in our Lord's words, though in the case more of rebuke, because of the answering convictions of conscience, "If I had not come and spoken unto them they had not had sin." If a man had not received his Talents, he might be in a more hopeful state than after he had received them, and abused them. And certainly it is of the utmost peril



to our souls to have the whole revelation of God made a commonplace to us, to listen to it as a thing of course, to have it in the deadened imagination as a picture on the wall, too familiar to be noticed, to arrogate it amongst our securities, our title-deeds, with no correspondent possession within ourselves, no Kingdom of God, no life, no striving, commensurate with this knowledge. If a man knows great truths he must live a great life, or the truths will inevitably enfeeble or corrupt his soul. If a man daily recounts a great creed his life must express a great faith, or he will assuredly fall into hypocrisy and unbelief. It would require devoted living, brave deeds of brotherhood, eager sacrifices of love, constant approaches to Christ, rich and growing assurances, to make the religious illumination in the midst of which we live, the teachings we receive, the contemplations that are familiar to us, healthy or safe. We cannot cut off the light that is all around us, we cannot reduce the disproportion that way. Will we try it by the other method, and bring our lives up to our light? Then only can God keep us in perfect peace, for then only shall our minds be stayed upon Him.

Take the cases in which religious peace is most apt to fail us, and observe how it is that God puts strength into us. Not by reasonings, or passive meditations, or contemplated pictures of the Divine character, whatever may be the rightful relations of these to the issues of action, but through the personal affections, the responding, the assimilating reliance on Himself as our Father and Inspirer, which institute

"the life of God in the soul of man." How can God fill with His holy love a *mean* man? or gladden with spiritual hope one who never saw a difficulty disappear before a generous effort? or conquer the fear of death in one all whose delights are among things that perish? Our spiritual peace fails us when we lose a vivid consciousness of the action in us of God's entreating Love, and *therefore* do not trust in the purposes which that Almighty love entertains for each of us, and would help us to achieve. And this will ever be so as long as we remain waiting for states of vision that we have not earned, instead of honouring affections, divine promptings, which we have. How does human love maintain itself? Not by dwelling on itself, but on its object. By acts of love, by the expressions of love, by the labours and duties of love, the sufferings and sacrifices of love. It is thus that the strength of life comes out, and we glow with the delight of a real passion that has its full way with us. It does not matter then that we have to toil and strive; every true man knows that toil and strife are not pains, but the fulness of being, when a blessed feeling sways him. Alas for the human love which thinks to live upon its passive states! It must languish and perish miserably, dead to its transforming function and intention. Have we not yet to apply that principle to the love of God, and the peace which belongs to a vivid consciousness of that love? Have we not to express our own love, instead of waiting for more of His to descend sensibly upon us, and lift us up heavenwards, away from its appointed service here

on earth? Have we not to work for Him in furthering of His promptings, to suffer for Him in what He calls us to, to lend our lives to the interests that are dear to Him? And just as the joy and devotedness of human love strengthen with every test it stands every offering of service it delights to render, will the heavenly Love grow in us with the fruit it bears, and God be able to fill our responsive nature with Himself. To love Him with a grateful heart, with an awed and reverent mind, even with the thrillings of the *soul*, may be only to receive the irresistible graces of His fatherly spirit,—coming from Him to us; to love Him besides with our “*strength*,” i.e. *with our will*, our co-operation with His purposes, is the filial answer and devotion of our own *personality*—from us to Him.

Our peace fails us when though, through God's grace, we despair not for ourselves, and can gather some blessed sunlight on our own worst trial days, we are yet stricken with trouble and the shadow of an undefined fear for the helplessness or the corruption of those with whom our lives are more or less bound up. This is the severest trial of the religious mind, for our *will* may be powerless against it, and it is a sorrow that, though it may be in no way self-regarding, in one aspect of it increases with our sensibility to evil. Still the main question for our peace is, How does God stand related to these His feeble or lapsed children? Does He despair and abandon? Will He seek the soul that is lost, and go into the wilderness with the child that has strayed?

Amid the infinite resources of His power, has He the Will to do this mighty thing, to continue His teachings till they become persuasions, to continue His love till it melts out obduracy, to continue the quickenings, the stings, the beseechings, of His light until it kills the voluntary darkness, to continue the fire of His Spirit, in heats of shame and burnings of penitence, until the divine flame wears out the roots of our rebellions? If we were assured of this, however we might sorrow we should not despair. But how can we become assured of this? Only by having in *ourselves* something of that divine long-suffering, and yearning pity, and spiritual trustfulness. *We* must weary first, before the suspicion could come to us that the All-Merciful could faint and grow weary. If *we* do not forsake, never will the possibility be suggested to us that God could forsake. "Is God less good than man?" is the simple question that would show our fears to be impious and presumptuous infidelity. Will it be answered, that though not less good He is more holy, and that holiness dominates goodness? No; it directs Goodness, conditions and perfects it, regulates its methods, but does not restrain it. A holy God, *because* He is holy, must love to convert sinners into sons. But if *we* cherish no such trustful pity and holy continuance, how can God give us comfort? If there is no spark in us of the divine love and perseverance, how can God encourage it? The heavenly breath finds nothing to warm and kindle if breathed on dead ashes where no life is, on the faithless negation of trust that hopes,

and ventures, nothing. Was the father, or the elder brother, in the parable, the more likely to feel assured of God's acceptance of a returning Prodigal, coming to himself, and to Him? Was the Priest and the Levite, or the good Samaritan, the more likely to know the peace of perfect trust on the divine compassions? In the prayer, in the practice, of the Son who knew the Father, is not a holy forgivingness declared to be the condition, and the measure, of our own forgiveness? "Forgive us, as we forgive!" "Father, forgive them! they know not what they do!"

Again, our peace fails us, when our confidence in immortality burns low, and as lamp after lamp of life goes out, we feel ourselves more and more as the kindred of the dust. Can we carry that doubt to God, and ask Him to burn it out directly in the unquenchable light of His own inherent glory? Assuredly the petition would be in vain, for though He might exalt us for a moment, if faith has no root in ourselves it must droop and fall. If a man has his earthly being in things that can be brought into no association with eternal life, what can he know of heavenly trusts? If a man lives in holy affections, takes delight in pursuits that know no limit, in devotion to interests that are dear to the ever living God, though he may utter no dogmatic words, subscribe no dogmatic creed, attempt no verbal proof of spiritual assurances, he will love, and hope, and labour, and expect, as one who is never to perish; nor will he ever be visited by the fear of



death, the oblivion and separations of death, unless it be that some unspiritual theology has made him a coward or an infidel. With the Heart men believe unto Righteousness.

In all such cases, it is not merely that our Will must be in accord with our Faith, before we know the peace of a divine reliance ; that is a spiritual axiom ; but, more than that, to purify and enlarge our faith, the affections themselves must pass away from self in the glow and action of generous life, before God's fellowship can sustain and warm them. If a man would know God's peace, he must raise into attitudes of life the affections that are of God's inspiring. If he would trust the unfailingness of God's love, he must know something in himself of the perseverance of love. He must be moved to give *himself* to the rescue, if he would believe God's freedom from despair of men. If he would have faith in God's intimations of immortality, he must have his life where the moth does not eat, where the rust doth not corrupt. True views of the character and perfections of God are, indeed, of unspeakable value, but mainly as aiding a real co-operation with his Holy Spirit, a perfect rest and trust upon Him, through fellowship with Himself. The secret of peace was with the Prince of peace : " If a man love me, he will keep my words, and my Father will love him ; and we will come to him, and make our abode with him." When the Son of Man cometh, will he find Faith upon the earth ? How can we wonder at what men now call the failure

of Religion, if our faith in it is not real! It would not fail us, either for Peace or for Righteousness, if only we could speak the first words of the Lord's Prayer, face to face with God, "Our Father, who art in Heaven!"

## XI.

### The Conditions of receiving Christ's Bequest of Peace.

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JOHN xiv. 27 :

“Peace I leave with you : my peace I give unto you : not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.”

CHRIST'S Peace is one which the world cannot give, and the worldly cannot take. It is the fulness of life, the result of holy and loving affections, with their issues of effort in inward and outward faithfulness to our highest convictions,—carried up into personal fellowships and communions of spirit,—rests of the heart and soul on the Beings above ourselves, who are able to exalt us to themselves. These Beings, preeminently, are God and His image in man,—the Father of our souls, and the earthly consummation of our nature.

The word *Peace*, in relation to ourselves, is not figurative. We know that we can be at war with ourselves. Even in moments of high purpose and aspiration, the lower habits, the selfish parts of us,

the timidity or sloth of the will, may resist the execution of their promptings :

The genius, and the mortal instruments,  
Are then in council ; and the state of man,  
Like to a little kingdom, suffers then  
The nature of an insurrection.

We are conscious of more tendencies than one in our nature endeavouring to master our will, of more inclinations than one, each drawing its own way, and to these the term *Peace* is as properly applicable as though we were divided into separate persons who had first to be reconciled, and then to unite their strength. If, as philosophers tell us, every emotion of delight proceeds from an energy in exercise, then the full Peace of a spiritual man must be in the consenting action of *all* his energies, when principles, habits, desires, affections, are all under one law, take the same direction and work together, and in the harmony of our being God reigns in us through conscience, as in the inferior creatures He reigns through instinct. This was the Peace that Christ possessed, and could impart. Of what the world would recognize as Peace, a freedom from anxious responsibility and suffering, with an unconditioned latitude of enjoyment, he had none ; he was the Man of Sorrows, and had not where to lay his head ; his rest was trust in God ; his meat and his drink to do the will of his Father.

In those impersonations of Art which are self-descriptive, and convey visibly or audibly the artist's inspiration, there is the language of expression ; so in

character there is the language of action ; and the life of Christ was as the countenance of his soul, the *expression* of his affections and his faith. His revelations from God never lay by him unused ; he was no maintainer and defender of opinions ; he had no more knowledge of God than he practically employed : we never hear him discussing doctrines ; they wrought in him, not he on them : they became springs of desire, effort, joy, beneficence ; his creed was neither spoken nor written, but expressed in life ; it has no full record but in himself ; what he believed that he was ; and he would have ceased to believe it, for he would have ceased to know it, if he had ceased to be it.

And in this was his Peace. His life was not lower than his soul, more troubled than his faith. There were great principles unfolded to him by God, and they took root in his nature. We do singular injustice to the real greatness of Christ when we regard him only as an Oracle of Truth, one through whom God sent to the world an authenticated message. If that was all we should be nearer to him than we are ; for "all things whatsoever he had received from the Father, he hath given unto us." There are other words of his that will explain the distance between the Disciple and his Lord : "If ye *know* these things, happy are ye if ye *do* them." The truth came by inspiration of God, through means which we cannot trace ; in what way the infinite holiness and goodness mingles His Spirit with ours we cannot tell ; but the effect on Christ was through



his own personality, *his* work not God's ; in whatever sense man can claim *anything* as his own. That he was the Messenger and Prophet of God was not his peculiar glory,—that glory he shared with others, that the truth which he received had its perfect work in himself, that the whole nature that was in him was harmoniously developed, that the word of the Father in him became flesh and dwelt amongst us,—this made him the Son of God.

Whatever were his peculiar natural aids of spiritual genius and sensibility, Christ attained his greatness by his own faithfulness to the occasions and intimations which the Father gave him. If we lose hold of this, we lose the whole value of the Christian life and doctrine. The secret means by which the Almighty Spirit prepares His instruments—the mode and the extent of His intercourse with the soul of Christ—of these we offer no explanation or theory ; but the character that grew up under this culture can never by a healthy religion be separated from the personal will of Christ, nor be otherwise regarded than as the result of a voluntary faithfulness to the grace of God. Even when a forced flower is made to exhibit summer's bloom on winter's bosom, the blossoming is not due to culture only, but to the nature on which it was exerted, which here offers no resistance, but yields up all its hidden glories to the hand that tends it ; surrounded with a special atmosphere, and in special circumstances, the fitness within, the genial nature, repaid the care and burst into beauty. And so with Christ,—if the Father was

the Husbandman the Son was the spiritual Vine ; if the culture was of God, the harmonious development of all that was in that rich and blessed nature was through the willing obedience that offered no resistance to the heavenly tending ; if the influences were of God's holy Grace, the answering faithfulness was of God's holy Child. And the true distinction of him who, by reason of a perfect obedience, is as the only Son of God, was that through a holy will the spiritual influences of the Father did produce their righteous fruit ; that no divine soliciting was rejected because it involved him in awful duties ; that to him the only true life, life eternal, was life in and with God. We, as in excuse for our own little faith in comparison with *his*, may dwell much upon his peculiar aids and relations to God. Grant it : exalt these as you may, still you will have to remember, that to whom much is given, of him much is required : his peculiar relations to God brought him peculiar responsibilities, an unexampled earthly solitude of spirit—a martyrdom never before conceived nor since achieved—they have marked him to all ages as “the Man of Sorrows.” No ; the more you exalt his calling, the more you establish that it was inward faithfulness that blessed him. Without this, mighty aids and inspirations would only the more have brought him to condemnation. Great gifts and a great position do not make goodness ; they make great demands on the conscience and the will ; they lift aspiration nearer to God, and make attainment more difficult. Outward helps can bless no one,

except by developing within himself an energy proportionate to their greatness. The strain upon the will, if our life is true, must ever be in the measure of the allotted talents. And this was the greatness of Christ, that, through holy love and obedience, he stood in his filial position as in his natural place. The insight of faith was sufficient for him. The insensibility of men could not move him. His life of sacrifice in no way looked to, or depended upon, returns of gratitude. He trusted and loved *the nature* to which he knew, from experience within himself, that God could and would speak. The hiding of his Father's face could not cause him to fear. His faith in no way depended on external smoothness and visible sunshine; his peace was from his inner communion with God's Spirit, not out of his own ability to decipher the mystic lines, or to trace back the tangled threads of discipline to where they are all gathered up in the hand of God.

And the *peace* he left his disciples came to them, as to him, through personal fidelity, in a great position, to the trusts committed to them. One of them abused that trust, and life could no longer be borne. The others, so far as we know, conquering for his sake infirmities of nature, died at last as blessed martyrs. He left them the fate of the world's benefactors when they live before their age; and yet he left them Peace, only that not as the world giveth, gave he unto them. The world's Peace would have been ease, distinction, indulgence, an honoured life: Christ's offer of Peace was in the martyr's commis-

sion: "To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I might bear witness to the truth." "As the Father hath sent me into the world, so have I also sent you into the world."

And, still, all who are in Christ receive Peace "not as the world giveth;" they find their life by losing it, by thinking not of themselves, but of their Inspirer, and of the great Family of God of which they are but members, which the Father can perfect only through the loving fidelity of each in his place. So much of the trusts and affections of a Christian heart as any one puts into his life, so much has he of Christ's Peace. The Gospel tells of a Kingdom of Heaven within: its glad tidings are not of outward things; it does not make a proclamation of a better world to come to present strife and disorder, and call that Peace. As well might you open to the sunlight some dark scene of contention and wretchedness, and pretend that the outward gilding had changed it into happiness and love. As peace in society is the union of all its interests, of all its persons, and of all its parties, as peace in the physical world is the harmonious blending of all its elements, "the bridal of the earth and sky," so peace in the soul is the consenting action of all its principles, the harmonious working of all its springs. A gleam of sunlight upon agitated seas troubled to their depths will not shine them into peace; and no more will a gleam of gospel light on troubled hearts, until it has become the light of all their life. It is an obvious truism that without diversities of elements, without the possi-

bility of conflict, there might be sameness but there could not be Peace. In single or in uniform things there may be stillness, or monotony, or deadness, but there cannot be concord,—and the more numerous and contrasted are the elements that mingle and flow into unity, the fuller is the image of Peace. The ocean waves stilled to rest, the heavens mirrored on the unruffled waters, no wind stirring on its vast bosom, convey for this reason an impression of profound Peace, deepened by the feeling that energies are slumbering which, if waked into strife no voice but God's could quell, no arm but the Omnipotent's control. The repose of Nature, when some glorious scene, with its countless objects and features, blends into one picture, in the rest which God has prepared for it, is for the same reason a symbolic image of Peace, and the spirit that drinks into its outward quiet receives intimations of a Peace that is deeper still. For why is it that the Peace of the soul is grander than all this; that all outward repose and harmony move us so deeply, but that they serve to shadow forth what the peace of the soul might be, that in ourselves there are more numerous elements to be combined, more delicate proportions to be adjusted, a finer balance to be maintained, more marked contrasts to be harmonized, sense and spirit, sight and faith, life and death, the present and the future, trust and the trial of trust—with a more fearful conflict and derangement possible! Peace, the peace of Christ, is not rest: it is not the absence of outward storm and trouble; it is not seclusion from



Life's imperious cares and terrible contrasts—it is to have *all our being* under one spirit, one law, one hope, pointed in one direction, awaiting one issue; to have the whole life hid in Him who is invisible—and to carry up every hour of it to its Source and its Sustainer, with whom there is no variableness nor shadow of turning, and in whom there is no darkness at all.

To some degree of true Peace nothing is wanting but fidelity in the life to whatever of light and truth has a place in the soul. Faithfulness to conscience is indeed the one condition of Peace, but if the whole Nature God has given us is not yet alive and at work, it is evident that such faithfulness has a narrower range to move in, and the resulting Peace is proportionally limited, however intense of its kind. He who has the widest affections, the most living intellect, the largest knowledge, the most sensitive spirit, has also the most duties, and he who has the most duties, if he is faithful, is also the most blessed. Conscience ruling, however strictly, over a narrow nature, an unstored uneducated mind, an unopened heart, limited sympathies and sensibilities, can never place us in harmony with our innumerable relations to society, and to all the rich discipline and swayings of God. Peace, to recur to the light of a definition, is the harmony, the union, of all our powers; and wherever, through want of use, through affections unexercised, our nature is poorer than God made it, there may be a strict though a narrow fidelity, a true though a bigoted conscientiousness, a self-denying though a

monkish zeal, but it would be idle to say there was the full concord of a Christian mind. It was the Peace of no formal conscience, of no restricted sympathies, of no bounded fellowship, of no unopened nature, with light and joy and God shut out at any inlet, that Christ bequeathed as his own.

What, then, are the conditions on which we may expect to receive this Peace of Christ? God will give it freely if we do not obstruct Him,—and He will give it in circumstances which make it a Peace that passeth understanding.

I. We must not suffer the one end of living, the life and growth of our souls, to be obscured or overpowered by the crowded and subsidiary interests which every day presents. We are in danger of forgetting the very centre and cause of all our being in the multitude of thoughts and solitudes which artificial life creates. We were not made for the sake of these things, and if not aids to our true life they ought to be less than nothing to us. We get entangled in the complicated relationships of conventional society, and our time, our strength, our means and, still worse, our sympathies, are exhausted in keeping up forms of living in which our hearts and souls, our great hopes and treasures, neither are nor ought to be—and as week after week passes over us we know not whether any true work has been done, whether any good thing has ripened in us, whether in spirit and in truth we have devoted one strenuous hour to the only ends of our being. “Surely man walketh in a vain show, and is disquieted in

vain." What cares consume him which belong not to any true view of his existence, and in which, though they waste and limit him daily, he has in fact no real interest! How blessed the release when, as sometimes happens, these factitious cares fall away from around us, and we see how grand is our life, how few and simple our wants, how independent of time and chance our real blessedness, how sublime the appeal of God to our faith—that whatever may become of the things that waste and chafe men's hearts our true work is unaffected, our true joy unimpaired, seeing that the severest trials of the affections must have been preceded by the richest tokens of His love, and become the experiences which are now most full of the intimations of immortality, since the God with whom we have to do is a faithful Creator, true in all His dealings, and not an omnipotent deceiver, betraying the expectations Himself has raised. We must keep our great convictions close to us—small interests must not be nearer to us and tarrying longer with us than the great ones—the fret and goadings of circumstance must drop to our feet and assume their true value, whilst our hearts troubled by them no more rise into the sphere of the life hidden in God that knows no change except from glory to glory, and from strength to strength. He who has any noble faith, any rich affection, any great pursuit, any inward source of effort and delight, will bear much of what the world calls evil without the consciousness of its presence, and for the consolation of such sorrows as are afflictions indeed, the abstraction from our life

of visible goodness and loveliness, the pledges and images of heaven—we must live by the trusts which come from the heart's knowledge of what He gave, and in giving promised; that He takes present love, and sense, and beauty, from a world that perishes only to unveil eternal things—and that by obstructions as well as aids, by trials of faith as by whispers of hope, in the strength of patience and the previsions of gratitude, He perfects the spiritual education of His children.

II. We must prepare ourselves for the *Peace* of Christ, by that faithfulness to time and opportunity which lays upon the coming hour no more than the hour brings with it. Our Past must be totally behind us—and before us, with clear minds and unfettered hands, an unspoiled Future. The arrears of other days must not hang around us, impeding our powers of present service, and wearying our hearts. How often are we prevented from giving an unembarrassed spirit to some good work now, to some thrill of joy that God is freely sending, to some great lesson which is claiming our notice, only because there is other work that properly belonged to another time, which lies heavy on the conscience! We fall behind in the work of life, and if so, even with the best feelings and desires, and however endowed with faculties, we become feeble, useless, unhappy, and shadowy men. God will supply fresh work and fresh interest for every hour we live, and we cannot walk upright under the burden of to-day, if we are bearing besides the burden of yesterday.

III. We must place ourselves in pure relations to the innocent enjoyments of life, to the rich gifts of God, and all the offered happiness of earth. We must know our indulgences to be lawful, and take them openly with a free and thankful heart. Cheerfulness of spirit, gratitude for blessings, to know the taste of the full cup of life, must be as much a worship as, in their place, are prayer, mercy, and the bowed heart of resignation. We must not have our lives spoiled of any true joy by the sense of surreptitious pleasure. If the dread shadow of our mortal being, the obtruding reality of death, hidden for a time behind the shows of things, so awes our spirits that we cannot move freely on this scene of love and joy and duty, suspecting the monkish view of life to be of legitimate authority, then it would be better to hide ourselves at once from the light of the sun, to shut out from our very sight all that is fair and attractive in the world, rather than to walk on forbidden ground with trembling hearts, and crouch at stolen joys in fear of God. But if, notwithstanding some misleading appearances, that monkish principle is false to all the higher teachings and requirements of the spirit, then must we enjoy the pure happiness and the overflowing mercies of life, not as self-indulgences which we are tempted to conceal, not as liberties which we had rather men did not know we allowed ourselves in, but as the gracious gifts of God who has prepared them for us, making love the sphere of service, and to whom the confiding thankfulness of His children is ever the devoutest hymn



of praise. To this, as to all other spiritual liberty, we must apply the principle of Christ, "if the Son shall make you free, you shall be free indeed," for as long as we feel as becomes the sons of God, members of our Father's family, we will allow ourselves in no indulgences which would grieve His spirit, lead us into forgetfulness of His other children, or close our way to a higher fellowship with Himself, and all besides is the unspoiled Eden of the world, guarded by no threatening sword, because entered without sin.

IV. And, lastly, through inward will and purpose, we must place ourselves in harmony with the providential circumstances of our outward life. If our lot is fixed, there must be no struggle against it, no neglect of the opportunities it gives because we dream that in some impossible position we should find our proper sphere, no impatience of the process or the place which God has appointed as best for us, and all whose bearings are mysteriously related to the unknown needs of our immortal being.

If these conditions are observed, we may not have prosperous lives, but we shall have peaceful souls; the world may hear little of us, but we shall be at peace with the world; we may have trials, for these are established parts of our Father's providence; we may have tremblings and despondencies, efforts with ourselves, for so had the Prince of Peace; we may have great afflictions, for we are bound up with weak and mortal beings, are exposed to grief and anxiety through innumerable connections, and the holier we

are the more the pangs of countless hearts pass into our own ; but we shall walk in the light of life, and know whither we go and the way, and collect our great trusts around us, and hear in the times of our need the voice of the Comforter who abideth for ever : "Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid."

## XII.

### Willful Sin against One Law of the Spirit, Entire Disloyalty.

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JAMES ii. 10 :

“For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.”

CHRISTIANITY aims at the formation of perfect character, not by painful processes of outward moulding, but by giving us the spirit that is of God ; by development as of a living principle, not by modelling as of a statue. This is its essence as a religion. Other systems have introduced human perfectibility as a theory, a speculation, or a dream ; Christianity makes it an obligation of man's essential nature. We can have no real spiritual relation with God without perfection becoming the aim of our souls. It is too true that most forms of religion, even of those bearing the name of Christ, are only modes of negotiation with God for the safety of man as of a being prone to evil, capable of reward and liable to penalty ; but in Christ Religion regards simply the inward relationship, the fellowship of affection, the communion of spirit, heart answering to heart ; its grand

purpose is to bring man to God, not as a servant in the submission of obedience, though a servant he must ever be; nor as a penitent in the anguish of contrition, though the sigh of aspiration may never be absent from one who has for ever to look upwards towards perfection,—but as a son who feels through all his being that he has no real life, no real interests, different from those of his Heavenly Father.

How vast seems the spiritual revolution that Christ contemplated! Yet how immediate in its essence, how simple in its means! Nothing is needed but the recognition as reality of that which all of us profess—that we should only mean what we say when we utter our most elementary convictions, that what we receive in word should come to us in power, that we should in very truth be children to Him whom we acknowledge to be our Father, subjects to Him whom we acknowledge to be our King. No aim of Christ can be a secret, nor deficiency of power to work that aim be feared, where it has been said in simple sincerity, “Our Father, who art in Heaven! Hallowed be Thy Name! Thy Kingdom come! Thy Will be done on earth as it is done in heaven!” The whole Christian religion, from its first movement to its last development, from a man’s first spiritual desire to resist temptation to the highest Heaven of God, is lodged like seed in the heart of him to whom those few words of prayer are reality and truth. To introduce one element into human thought, that man should know his spiritual

lineage, in whatever state under whatever clime he may be found, that he should come to recognize whose Spirit speaks in him, who inspires him, who seeks him, who desires to have him,—is it possible that this should for ever remain a difficulty, rather is it possible that the recognition of what is so elementary should for ever be escaped? Yet, to recognize it is to take away everything that can separate between man and God, to make the adoption of Christ's words, "Be ye perfect even as your Father in Heaven is perfect," a spiritual necessity of our own souls.

What did Christ do to help that recognition? He removed the veil from the face of God, that we may know Him in the image of our nature. He whose new method was, "The pure in heart see God," he who said, "I and my Father are one," lived simply among men, finding in opportunities common to us all, in the interests and questions, the joys and sorrows of his day, amid the villages of Galilee, the streets of Jerusalem, the desert, the mountain, and the lake, scope enough for the life of a Son of God. Revelation has conferred its greatest blessing on the world in giving us the perfect type of the religious man without excess or straining of the religious sentiment, in such close connection with the common and homely incidents of human experience. If we had been left to ourselves to apply the spirit of a Son of God to daily life and duty we should have fallen into all extravagances, deeming unclean what God makes pure. But in Christ all this danger is done away. The Word is more than the Spirit of God vaguely speaking. It



took flesh and dwelt among us. This is the whole scheme of salvation; its object the perfection of man; its power the Fatherhood of God—the *application* of the Power, the mediating instrument, in a son of man who was also the holy Child of God, the Way, the Truth, and the Life. What inexhaustible springs of hope, courage, and inspiration has the gospel opened in those who simply believe that God is the Father of their souls, and that Jesus represents the spiritual child whom the Father seeks to worship Him! "This is eternal life, to know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent." What possible religious exigency can there be for which these two spiritual beliefs do not provide? From what evil are they inadequate to protect us? To what heights are they inadequate to raise us? Our salvation will be found to consist in our real acceptance of the simplest faiths of the soul. Religious life then becomes not law but spirit, irrepressible growth conquering difficulties, because, as the living principle in the tenderest plant breaks through the hardest crust of the earth, uplifting weights of dead matter, spiritual power is irresistible: it is then the grain of mustard seed whose living roots, planted by God, are in the soul itself.

Even Christ, though a higher has not been imagined by human thought, never proposes himself but as a conductor to God our Father. And it is clear that if any standard short of God had been offered, or limit fixed, man must have lost the essence of his immortality, the capability of indefinite growth;

the appeal would have been made to him on grounds beneath the highest, there would be a point of attainment that could not be passed, and so the distinction between the spiritual and the unspiritual creatures of God become a matter of degree. It is now our essential glory, but also the source of our unlimited responsibility, the express grounds on which we must enter into judgment, that from any station or condition of character we may advance towards God, that no barrier, inward or outward, can be considered as impassable when once spirit recognizes spirit. He who calls God Father can deem it no more than natural growth to go on unto perfection.

Doubtless it is strange and sad to turn from such elementary principles to the contrasts which our own hearts and lives exhibit in their actual relation with God. But if we turned more to such internal lights, and left our hearts less to the action of things that come in common course and to the inertia of our unspiritual temperament, this would not be; and the *contrast* might then become very striking the other way—in the predominance of the spiritual part of us—that beings so clogged and bound, with eyes so bandaged by time and sense, should yet see so clear, and aim so high, and reach so far. There is certainly nothing to encourage presumption or security, but everything to call forth the sense of responsibility and effort, in the belief that God has planted in our nature the seeds of His own perfection; and, short of that belief, there could be no such thing as spiritual religion—the Lord's Prayer would be made up of

unreal assumptions. Who will discern his spiritual poverty with such a consciousness of sin as he who knows that he has natural and unlimited access to the Source of Life, depending not on the extraordinary favour of God—for God is always willing and never changeable—but absolutely on the real desires of his own spirit? Who will be touched with such lively penitence as he who has to answer to his own soul and to God, not for yielding to the evil of a Nature that is all evil, but for resisting and abusing that which he knows to be good, and is compelled to say, "Father, I have sinned against Heaven and before Thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called Thy son"? And surely, if humiliation is to be looked for on this earth—the overwhelming sense of an unworthy life—it ought to be found among those of us who, having adored God that we were made in His Image, have afterwards to acknowledge that we have enthroned idols in our hearts. *Humility* is not for sinners; it is the grace of a true child, of the Son of God himself, of one ever looking upwards in filial aspiration and dependence. The sinner who yields himself to his sin has forfeited filial humility and taken in exchange, if he knows his sin, humiliation and remorse. Humility is the reverse of humiliation; it is the attitude of worship, the sense of One above us who, with rightful authority, invites us to Himself; it is, as Christ said, the spiritual way of exaltation.

Neither is it spiritually true that this view is not the efficient one, and that men are religiously moved by terrors and by bribes. The Gospel declares that

souls are won to God by the Spirit of God ; that Satan cannot cast out Satan, nor any evil thing cast out an evil thing except by the introduction of another evil thing. It is the contrast of the evil that is in *his life*, in his habits and in his passions, with the Holy Spirit that is in his soul, that is the spring of Repentance to every man. There is no feeling of responsibility until there is a consciousness of choice and power—no horror of sin until the pleading voice of the Eternal Spirit is clearly heard ; and neither fear nor hope can work the miracles of grace until the spiritual appeal is lodged deep in an answering heart : “ Be ye followers of God, even as dear children.” “ The Temple of God is holy : which Temple *ye are*.” We stand upon the Gospel ; we are not to be placed on a lower ground by a lower teaching ; we follow the purest authority ; we find there the spiritual way of speaking to the souls of men, the wisdom of God unto salvation. It is on this wise : “ Be ye perfect, even as your Father which is in Heaven is perfect. Purify yourselves even as He who has called you is pure. Be ye holy, for God is holy. Partakers of the Divine Nature, give all diligence to add to your faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge, and to knowledge temperance, and to temperance patience, and to patience godliness, and to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness charity : for he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off.”

No one supposes that the appeal to be perfect because our Father is perfect either implies that the perfection of God is attainable, or that it mocks us

and means nothing. It refers to the spirit of holy life which must be the same in all spiritual beings, and where it exists cannot willingly be tolerant of any known evil in itself. It refers to the necessary tendency towards absolute goodness of any real fellowship with God, the holy longing of the spirit after all things true, and pure, and lovely, the sense of unbroken obedience that is due to a righteous Law-Giver who has His own assessor in His children's souls,—that the love and imitation of God must spread in all directions from any one point of kindred life within us; and if we have nothing in ourselves to interpret this, to make it clear to us that we have no choice but to go on unto perfection, we are not yet conscious partakers of our Father's Spirit; we cannot say the first words of the Lord's Prayer with a real recognition; we are, in St. Paul's language, yet in our sins, and have to be newborn from the dead.

Now the relation of a law to a spirit is not that it defines, or is capable of defining, the ultimate growths and developments of spirit, but simply that it marks out certain definite things which cannot be permitted by any one who has the Spirit in his heart. Transgression is capable of being defined; and Law puts its finger-mark upon certain evils with which the Spirit of God in a man cannot consentingly coexist, and must strive unceasingly to destroy. In this sense the maxim that "Whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point he is guilty of all," is from the lower ground of law, but the counterpart of the spiritual recognition, that "Whosoever calls



God Father with any reality must own his obligation to go on unto perfection." The Spirit gradually brings forth more and more of its divine fruits : the Law declares what are the *evil* fruits not one of which can proceed from that Spirit, since the same fountain cannot send forth sweet water and bitter. Thus he who has God for his Ruler cannot choose to indulge some one known passion or weakness, or refuse to take some one forward step to which God's Spirit prompts him, and say, "At all points else I will obey, but at this point I will please myself"; for it is just *at* that point that *his* will comes into collision with God's will, and shows that God is not his Ruler.

And this shows the importance of distinct Law even to the most spiritual minds. We are all in danger of self-deception, of falling into some gross Antinomian or Gnostic corruption, if we pretend to be so spiritual that we are independent of express prohibitions. He who guides his course by the stars yet cannot safely neglect the lights and beacons on the earth which tell him where his way does *not* lie. Law warns us when, perhaps unknowingly, we have left the higher guidance, and are now yielding to unsuspected currents, acting from inferior motives, that if we are but approaching certain practices, indulging or tolerating certain moods, using certain language, adopting certain modes of reasoning akin to artifices and insincerities on questions of life and conscience, *we must have neglected* the Divine light within us, and have confused the promptings of the Spirit with

our own grosser passions, before the eye of the soul could thus have lost its purity of discernment. Here it is a blessing to us when Law rises up, not indeed as a guide, but as a warning, and declares in unmistakable terms that we have wandered from our course ; that the life we are leading or permitting, the temper we are manifesting, the friendships we are forming, cannot possibly proceed from the Spirit of God in us. It is thus that the sudden detection of ourselves in some questionable direction, away from simplicity and truth, from the natural developments and alliances of our own principles of thought and life, should instantly denote that our inward communion with God must insensibly have been relaxed, else we never could have drifted there : and, if we are inclined to justify the questionable position after we have suspected the inherent incongruity, should at once convince us that the evil has gone deep. For the worst spiritual danger is when a man professes to place himself within the guidance of God, and then mistakes the whisperings of self for higher monitions ; when, for example, on the one side he confounds the feebleness of conviction which requires no martyrs with religious liberality, or, on the other, mistakes the small wilfulness or rancour of narrow natures for the firmness which adheres to unyielding truth and righteousness. Against such dangers the soul that is jealous of its purity will be constantly on the watch, and take timely notice of the self-deceptions of the heart. A spirit prompts us, and a law warns us. On the side of good there is no restraint or limit :

the water of life rises to its source. On the side of evil we are girt in by express barriers, and receive distinct notice ere we pass into forbidden ground. How full is our responsibility for that filial mind which may aspire to God, which may not permit the minutest indulgence in wilful wrong ! The germ of the Father's perfectness is the leaven that is working in the spirit of man.

The Law that "whosoever offendeth in one point is guilty of all," is simply the negative side of the positive guidance: "Be ye holy, for God is holy." Loyalty to God is not to be ascertained by counting the separate acts of our life, but by the spirit that animates them all ; and *if there be* an evil deed that we *will* do, an evil passion that we *will* indulge, an evil habit that we *will not* break, at that point we have met God and refused Him our allegiance. It does not matter at what point the spinal cord is cut, if it is cut anywhere ; the transmission of life is as effectually stopped as though the whole column was destroyed. If St. James had said that "Whosoever doth not keep the whole *Spirit* of God keeps no part of it," it would have been indeed a hard doctrine, a sentence of condemnation even on the best ; for no one is perfect in that sense, and shortcomings and imperfections are not to be confounded with wilful perseverance in known transgression. But *Law* deals with SINS, and whoever sins with his will has, within the period of his sin, utterly broken with God, with what injury to the strength and joy of his soul even in directions where it is not tempted none but God

is able to say. The strength of a chain is only the strength of its weakest link. We are united to God by a chain of living obedience, of graces and virtues which are all one in Spirit, and if we willingly sever it anywhere we have at that moment utterly fallen out of communion with the Inspirer of our life. A grain of dust placed intentionally on a watch-wheel makes the stoppage of its movement, its deadness, as absolute for the time as though we produced the same effect by the breakage of the whole. The evil is more easily removed, the instrument less permanently injured ; but the purpose of its existence, its integrity, is, while the evil lasts, as completely destroyed. But more than this, such is the difference between mechanical and spiritual life, the wilful indulgence of the soul in the smallest sin not only destroys its function for the time, but impairs the whole living principle to an incalculable degree in purposely breaking at any known point its fellowship with God, though it may more readily recover its purer state than if malignity or deep corruption had darkened the self-indulgence.

The Law of the Lord, the Psalmist says, is "exceeding broad," branching in all directions ; but God looks less for complete manifold conformity than for the one spirit of filial obedience ; and wherever a divine Law is knowingly broken the Lawgiver is purposely dishonoured. This, indeed, is the apostle's reasoning : "Whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, is guilty of all. For he that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill. Now if thou

commit no adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor of the law. So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty." That is, wherever the struggle comes between a Law of God and an inclination of man, *how we use our free will* at this point determines the whole question of our allegiance. It is vain to talk of our obedience at all the other points where we are not tempted. The spirit can be engaged in but one act at one time, and if that is an act of disobedience, we are for that time expending the whole liberty of our being in rebellion against God.

And no one who understands what "*spiritual service*" is, will say that this is a hard law: it is simply a pure one. We use it every day against one another. If a man exhibits some marked moral unsoundness, we do not consider it as a detached speck, but as a central disease. One resolute, determined act of selfish unkindness, of deliberate hardness of heart, of broken confidence, of violated integrity, fixes our opinion of *his spirit*. We do not think of cataloguing the virtues, and ascertaining how many of them he has not violated, before we determine that there is no health in him. The spirit that rejoices in such judgment would be uncharitable, but the scales are just and true.

There is one lesson we should learn from these principles, the obligation of spiritual symmetry; we should no more break our communion with the Spirit of Grace than with the Spirit of Truth. Men are ready to admit that there are great and indispensable moralities without which no interest would



be safe, and *his* worth is *sterling* who abounds in these, whilst the finer virtues and purities on which the well-being of society does not so manifestly depend, and which have only the Law of God's perfection to sustain them, are not among the ends for which we live. The gentleness, that is not an instinct but a chastened sentiment, a part of our Christian culture,—the generosity that hides its own wound lest other hearts should bleed,—the quick love that, with art delicate as genius, removes the friction from a vexed or feeble spirit,—the sympathy that waits not for sore hours of need, but relieves the oppression of our joys as of our sorrows,—the genial play of a pure heart, without which domestic life is bleak and cheerless, like a landscape without sunlight,—these are not the adornments or the drapery of a man's character, which he may have, or not have, without being materially altered; they are living fruits that must be ripened in us, according to the measure of our nature, by any full communion with the Spirit of Christ and the Love of God. The mind that does not know them, whatever else it may be, is not the mind of Christ. And the mind that does know them, and violates them, is disloyal to the Law of the Spirit. Spiritual life is as really, though not as fatally, spoiled by the absence of meekness as by the absence of honour. And wherever, through ungentle tempers, and sensibilities blunted by self-will, hearts are hurt and injured, what men call *unamiable* a deeper Judge would pronounce unspiritual and unchristian.

The essential thing is not that we cultivate this virtue or that, but that we have in us the roots of all goodness, that we cherish the spirit which can suffer no wilful defect to dwell near it, no essential grace to be absent unmissed, that we live in and with the God of all Perfectness and have Him as the Feeder and Keeper of our being.

## XIII.

### The Moral Limits of Accident.

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JAMES iii. 5 :

“ Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth.”

IT is true that a little spark may kindle a great matter, but unless it fell on inflammable material it could kindle no fire at all. And this we hold to be the lesson of the text: collect the materials of fire, whether it be of the fire of God or of the fires of Evil, and the spark that inflames will not long be wanting. It may seem, or be, an accident, but the ready accumulated matter which burns where the spark falls is no Accident at all. The opportunities of life often seem accidental, but preparation for such opportunities, and the ability to use them when they come, are among the most deep-seated parts of God's purpose and of man's will. Where there is no such preparation, and no such ability, a man loses his measure of that which is said to be the distinction of genius, but in fact is the privilege of all strong purpose, the power to kindle its own fire. And an Accident often seems to determine a man's destiny. Some incident unplanned by him will shape his way. Even the

choice of a profession, which more than anything else colours a man's being, seems often to turn on circumstance, to have no relation to individual will. It is but seldom that in very early life so strong a bent of character exists that the after course and direction of the mind have never been in doubt, and only grow with its growth and strengthen with its strength. And when not determined from within by strong pointings of faculty and desire that show our natural walk, this momentous question affecting the whole fitness of a man's being is deferred till that period when choice of some kind becomes a necessity, and then is settled by the opportunities that offer, by the openings, as they are called, that may happen to exist in the various employments for the talents of men. And so it becomes an outward chance instead of a spiritual choice, with what *kind* of interests a man's thoughts are to be filled through all his working days, interests which if they do not absorb his whole being, yet make the conditions and background of existence from which the spiritual portraiture comes forth. It can hardly be supposed that this is as it ought to be, or that decisions affecting the aptitudes of nature, the success and joy, or the failure and waste of existence, can thus be determined, according to the accidental facilities of a time, wisely and well. Doubtless there are many minds, perhaps the vast majority, with no special direction, that take kindly to any work they have a reasonable prospect of performing with a creditable measure of success, to whom opportunity and habit entirely fill

up the place of inward determination. But there are others who discover when it is too late that they have lost their way, and who make their misdirection serve as an excuse for failure, for joyless wills and spiritless lives. It is a great blessing to character when from its earliest periods its destination shines out from itself, or is marked for it by some obvious fitness that turns the streams of thought into one channel, when the spark that kindles the material and substance of our being is either a particle of inward fire, or is derived from disposing sympathies and affinities so dear and venerable that they take rank as an authoritative guidance for our spirits. For in this case not only are the wanderings of an unsettled choice escaped, the dissipation and restlessness that ensue amidst many possibilities with no determining guidance, but all the responsibilities of its course are from the first felt to lie upon the mind itself, and its enthusiasm gathers steadily upon a destiny that seems at last rather offered by Providence than fashioned by human choice. This way comes the hope of filling a calling in life with a great spirit, of finding in its scope and room not only for the employment of capacity, but for the satisfaction of spiritual being; for all fresh minds are naturally prompted to dwell upon their coming future with ideal yearnings, to exalt and glorify in their thoughts a life they contemplate as their own. And hence it is always of signal promise when the choice of a profession is determined not by the chance of an outward opportunity, but by the native fire of inward purpose. Often it



happens that this individual fitness, the natural pointing of capacity, does not appear in very early life, and then, where it is possible, it is of the last importance that education should not assume too soon the place of a divine guidance over us, that it should wait in patience for the direction of nature, should withhold all special training, and build up the mind on those universal studies which are the fitting preparation for all professions, and are especially necessary for the strength and the correction of minds that are to work under the limitations and biasses of peculiar employments and callings in life. An accident, then, of opportunity, or a fitness of nature, in the choice of a profession, determines the destination of men, and surely it is well for personal enthusiasm, it is well for the responsibilities that strengthen and exalt the will, when it is felt that so great a matter has been kindled not by a chance spark of outward facility, but by some inward fire of God. But, whether our life is chosen *for* us, or *by* us, the great matter is that it kindle our whole nature, our intellect, our heart, our imagination, our ambition, and our conscience ; that in its place it be our life, and not merely our livelihood ; that regarding it as our special means of serving the world, our whole spirit shine through it, and yet receive no wound from it, so that as often as we are relaxed from its express service, we are free in capacity and will for all the other functions of spiritual men.

The growth and prosperity of *Families* seems often the product of an Accident. But in all these

things the element of chance is less than it appears, and beneath the good fortune to which we attribute so much there might be found by a qualified eye the natural endowment, the fire of steadfastness, the planning mind, the trained faculty, which turn to rare account opportunities that are common enough. Doubtless some one gifted man may open the way for those who come after him, light a blaze of social distinction, and transmit a long line of hereditary glory; but with the original founder success was no accident, and inherited honours are little better than public exposure without the personal qualities of capacity or of goodness. There are what have been called great accidental discoveries in Science, but such accidents occur only to men of vast genius, or to those whose ample knowledge enables them to discern the exact value of every fortuitous suggestion; and no deep secrets of nature ever suddenly reveal themselves, except to those who are already on their tracks. Many an apple had been seen to fall to the ground before Newton's prepared mind asked the reason, and suspected the law. Many a brazen lamp had been seen to swing from fretted roofs before the memorable evening when Galileo sat by the Confessional at Pisa, and watched the regulated movement of the Pendulum Light passing to and fro through the solemn gloom of the vast cathedral. The little fire that kindled that great matter, and traced as on the air with dots of light the cycloid curve, was not in the burning lamp, but down in the depths of that meditative mind, prepared by large study,

and watching in profound thought for such hints as Nature herself might give in elucidation of her laws. Fortunate incidents, fortunate opportunities, come to all men who have the faculty to discern their value and turn them to account ; but so outward is our eye, so fond are we of pictures, that we elevate the circumstance above the power, the phenomenon above the mind.

The fates of *Nations*, too, are often thought to follow an Accident. A man, a battle, appears to alter the destinies of kingdoms, and the history of the world. Such things seem all-powerful when they fall in with the course that Nature herself is taking ; though against that course they would be trifles light as air. The waste of nations is a moral process, and goes on from within through the predominance of a material prosperity, or by the absorption of the citizen in private interests. It was not the incursion of the barbarians that overthrew Rome. When Rome was sound at heart no barbarian approached her gates. It was when Roman citizenship expired, and a life of lofty sacrifice was no more the standard of private men, that the loosened members fell away, and the dead body became a prey to the eagles. No nation ever collapsed and perished but from an inward disease.

Even *Religion* itself is often represented as not removed from the sway of an Accident. Historians of the picturesque order will tell you that the faith and worship of a large portion of mankind was for a moment suspended on the flight of a bird. Had

it not been for the swallow that flew out of the cave where Mahomet was hiding, or—for the various *forms* of the story betray the myth—for the spider that wove its web across the entrance, leading to the inference that no man could be there, his pursuers would have found him where he lay, and ended his mission with his life. But great men under the ordinary Providence of God are not chance products—they are not isolated from the sympathies and intelligence of their age—rather are they the clear expressions of that intelligence, its necessary exponents. They only lead the spirit which they seem to create. When great men lead their own age with them, which the greatest never do, they are not absolutely above their age, but rather endowed with insight to understand all that is in it. The world owes much to great men—they mark the epochs of its history—but when their time comes they are not Accidents ; and if one failed another would appear.

And if thus the kingdom of Accident would seem to be confined within slender limits even in regard to the influences which come outwardly on men—if all the issues that are of serious moment are to be referred in small measure to external circumstance and in large measure to inward fitness and accountable will—if no heap of fuel without the contact of some living fire, and no fire without collected fuel can kindle into a mighty matter—and with our own spirit lies the *choice* of what *kind* of fuel it will kindle with its fire, whether it will flame the passions or the soul, I say if such be the restricted power of the influences

that externally come *to* us, so that with ourselves rests the responsibility of choice and self-formation, *much more* must the influences that go out from us, the influences that *we exert*, working according to their nature as a leaven in men's hearts, be referred to our direct causation, and all their natural consequences be charged upon us as express creatures of our will. Not that we always distinctly know what those consequences will be—what great matter the fire of our nature breathing from us will kindle into life—not that we contemplate or are able to anticipate definite results and will them to take place. God has laid upon us no such power, either for blessing or for cursing, but that we know, or may know, the *quality* of our own spirit, of what sort it is, that prompts our deeds and words, or smoulders in our silence. We know whether the fire that is in us is the flame of love, or the heat of passion, or a sensual glare; and knowing this, whatever seeds we sow we must be charged with the fruits; whatever spirit we put into utterance or action, to work and bring forth according to its kind, must lay its good or its evil at our door. *We* are responsible for no consequences but those which must naturally be expected to follow from the moral elements which we ourselves introduce into life, or from the wilful absence of some element at our command which would have wrought benignant results, and which, unless we had listened to some evil or sullen monitor within, we could not have withheld; but for all moral effects and relations which are the natural fruits of *our* action through temper, word,



manner, character, general bearing, or special deed, we cannot evade a direct responsibility—we cannot scatter fire and plead that we knew not *what* it would kindle. It may be that we work more evil, or cause more unhappiness, than if there was wisdom or virtue in others ought to be excited by our action ; but the perception of this only increases responsibility, for it is in the midst of inflammable matter that one is bound to be the most careful of fire ; nor can the weakness of others ever be considered but as deepening the guilt of those who speak, or act, or look, in a spirit whose natural fruits are poisonous. If a capricious, a petulant, or self-asserting temper alienates affection, raises a wall between the free sympathy and natural intercourse of hearts, extinguishes the great constant fires of esteem and love, and kindles daily the small heats of contempt and scorn, it cannot plead that it meant no such great matter, and that magnanimity and forbearance might have borne with it and seen better things beneath the troubled surface of its weakness ; for though that is true, it is a truth with a double action ; it belongs to the responsibility of him who is tempted, but does not lessen that of him who is the tempter. Christian love with its gracious power, and out of the depths of its patience, might indeed bear our sins until at last it bore them all away ; but it were a monstrous thing that we demanded virtue in others as the neutralizer of our evil, that their gentleness should extend to us the liberty of passion, that we required extraordinary goodness in *them* only that we, with less of mischief,

might be selfish and ungoverned ; and if we touch the cords even of strong love with unholy fire, none of us must complain that the bands have parted. The little fire of a rude speech will kindle flames of discord, and turn the edge of many spirits that before were calm and genial ; and though it is true that the temper of a higher refinement would have thrown off the rudeness, that a gentler dignity would have subdued it into self-consciousness, that a richer power of intellect, a livelier force and play of mind, might soon have won it over to some purer interest, and borne it along in the current of higher sympathies ; and though purposely to withhold these when they might minister to peace is as much of evil as purposely to apply the spark of malice, still the noxious spirit must bear its own burden and eat its own fruits ; it has no right to complain that other spirits of a heavenly order were not present to intercept its influence ; and its excuse is all the less, its sin all the greater, that it scattered wicked fire among minds that it knew by experience were subject to temptation. It is this that adds selfishness and cruelty to the personal impurity of all wrong doing. If we lived in solitude, or if we lived with angels, if the quick sparks of our passions fell on natures that were as snow or as marble, we might still indeed live in sin, for none need to be told how foul a solitary heart may be, or how ungoverned may be a temper that yet meets with no provocations ; but these self-born sins would not then be additionally burdened with the misery and the pollution of others, a misery and

a pollution of which, as of all moral action, no man can see the end.

What great matters of wretchedness and wrong may be kindled by the smallest fire of evil, kindled not accidentally but naturally, need hardly be pointed out; they are so familiar that they have passed into proverbs. An unguarded tongue that belongs to a nature not malignant, but only trivial, stripped of high interests, devoid of sacredness, without the reserve and awe and fear to do a wrong with which every just mind speaks of the moral life of another, may open fountains of bitterness that never can be closed. This indeed was the evil influence of which St. James was speaking in the text. With an intensity of figurative expression showing a very intense feeling of the evil, he says, "It setteth on fire the course of nature, and is itself set on fire of hell." And so some small burning wound of envy, jealousy, discontent, or of inordinate self-regard, will eat the heart of peace and nobleness out of our life—make us cankered in our solitude, and ungenial to the world. Some worldly conformity, at first in small things, through the influence of companionship, the solicitings of sympathy out of its lawful sphere, will remove the safe-guard of principle, and place us on the easy slopes where we descend so gently that we know not we are falling. The gradual abuse of a natural faculty, such as the power and the temptation to sit in the seat of the scorner, the gift of ridicule, in itself allied to high uses and perceptions, may take all reverence from the spirit, and give a man over

to mere lightness and contempt as a poor jester to whom no one would commit a serious thought. An indulgence in thoughtlessness, or in over-thoughtfulness if it is too inwardly turned, may close our eyes to what is passing before us, take from us the fine power of moral observation, strip us through our little sympathy, and failure in readiness, of all confidence and reliance from others, until the life of which we are a part, and which ought to form one organic whole, falls into separate pieces through unfitness, disappointment, and neglect. And to all these we must add the great matters so constantly occurring of distastes, and aversions, and individual antipathies, which often seem unaccountable, and *are* unreasonable, unchristian, and even inhuman, but which nevertheless have some foundation in Nature, and are kindled by little fires of evil provocation which might, and ought to be, extinguished.

But there is also fire from Heaven; and here, too, great matters are kindled by a little spark. An influence for good will work more wonderful transformations than an influence for evil. It may seem a small thing for a child in a sullen mood to receive a kind word of searching sympathy—but it may take the darkness out of its heart, and the fiend out of its temper, and raise the loving spirit in its nature into reverential dependence on the gracious Wisdom that helps it in its need. Look at the difference between two lots equally bare and wretched in outward things but with this distinction, that under the one there is the inward fire of a Divine Trust, and to the

other the world is only what it seems. A thought of God entering a care-worn heart—a sigh of prayer—a sense of relief in heaven and of holy purpose on earth will change the whole aspect of existence, draw strength from weakness, and anthems from despair. And something infinitely less than a thought of God, even a thought of man, a sense of human fellowship, a belief that there is aid and mercy near, that there are hearts which *would help* and bless if they knew the need, this alone, though it go no farther than the inward assurance, and no help be sought or given, will take the bitterness from hardship, reconcile the loneliest sufferer to his race, and sweeten his relations to all the world. We know not what great matters may be kindled by passing some of the living fire of a true humanity and religion from spirit to spirit—what large interests of society may depend on the utterance of a brotherly sentiment towards our fellow men. How often do men stand at the turning-point of a life when a word might save them—or a word send them hopeless and hardened down the ways of dark despair! How many of the penitents to whom Christ spoke those strange words of pardon, of trust and warning, can we believe it possible returned again to their sins! No doubt there is a time when such words might be of no avail; but there is also a time when they would be all-powerful, and the great matter is that we have the fire of God in us to kindle a new light in the heart when the opportunity serves. Even noble minds may struggle long in heavy darkness until the spark falls



that lights the brooding vapours into brilliant flame. The historians are fond of telling us that perhaps we owe the whole influence of Luther's mind to that old monk who whispered to the wretched ascetic whose busy conscience no penances could soothe, "the just shall live by faith"—and so created anew the Religion of his nature. Though here again we must remember the long preparation of the great Reformer to receive such peace, the revolt of his spirit from the yoke of an outward service, and the travail of soul with which he had cast about for the free Light of God.

In spiritual things we have no measure for great or for small but in the *quality* of the fire that lives in us and breathes from us. To know what we are at heart, is to know all the consequences that we are accountable for. If there is evil in us it will attract evil, and work towards evil. If there is good in us God will make it serve His glory. The streams are quite beyond us—we know not where they go—the Fountain is ours and we can keep it so holy, so nigh to Him who cleanses where He is, that bitter waters cannot proceed from it. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit. A corrupt tree cannot bring forth good fruit: and by its fruit is the tree known.

#### XIV.

### Use and Abuse of Religious Sensibility.

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EZEKIEL xxxiii. 32 :

“And lo, thou art unto them as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well upon an instrument : for they hear thy words, but they do them not.”

IT would be a great mistake to compute a man's worth from his Sensibilities. All the sensibilities of goodness might exist in one who is absolutely without Christian self-denial, who is simply an emotional instrument that vibrates to certain impulses and forces. The emotions may have no issue beyond themselves : they perish without fruit ; the chords are struck, thrill, and subside ; the instrument itself is not strengthened, rather is damaged and weakened by abortive use.

It may be that the Priest and the Levite when they looked upon the wounded man, took the other side and passed so swiftly by because their sensibilities were disturbed at the sight of a fellow-being in pain, and that a desire to escape from their own torture suppressed all active sympathy. The Samaritan, perhaps, did not feel more, but he felt more virtu-

ously ; he felt less for and from himself, more for and towards the sufferer before his eyes ; he felt perhaps less of horror, but more of compassion—his emotions did not convulse himself and perish unproductively, but in healthy and holy life proceeded direct towards their natural object, and so relieved the heart they flowed from, and executed that whereunto they were sent for the suffering being they flowed towards.

And still further, it may be that the good Samaritan, like a good physician long experienced in ministering to human suffering, discharged his painful offices, handled the wounds and the blood with no perceptible dismay, with the beauty of earnest and occupied Love upon his face, and with the quiet of an intense self-forgetfulness which gave him the command of all his faculties—and that he went forwards on his journey with something more than before of the peace that passeth understanding, and lay down at night in the relaxed sweetness of a compassionate and unaccusing heart that unconsciously brings near to us the trusts of God—whilst the Priest and the Levite were pursued all the day by horrid and accusing thoughts of the appealing distress from which they had so selfishly fled, and were haunted all the night by the pallid faces of dying men. For there are no ghosts so terrible as the spectres of good and holy impulses that sought to move the soul, but had their graves where they were born. The one, for that day—perhaps for many days, had lost their life through seeking it : the other, willing to lose himself, had, without seeking it, found a portion of life eternal.

It is very important for us not to confound what God and Nature do in us with that which is left for our own will and self-denial to effect, with the active life of the goodness that moves in us which alone is our own, or any part of our individuality. Our principles of duty, our sense of right, when steadfastly pursued, our affections when loyally honoured, become our own—but not so our subjective emotions; they are the movements in us of a gracious God or the gifts of our sentient nature, and unless our conscientious will honours and supports them, we know not what they may be to-morrow, or when God may deign again to lay His hand upon a soul that He has so often finely touched, but to no issues. It might be very salutary for us to familiarize our minds not only with the general truth, but with detailed instances of the many obvious and recurring cases in which sensibilities carry with them no moral worth, and yet have a great power of hiding their worthlessness from those who are much affected by them. For when barren and self-exhaustive sensibilities stand for Christian goodness, we have not simply lost the virtues that ought to have been produced, we have contracted an incapacity for goodness that has to be measured by the number and the intensity of these ineffectual instigations from our God: we have not only buried our Lord's money, we have made our own souls the cerements and grave-clothes that kept it from a living circulation. Yet, so prone are we to judge from appearances, instead of looking on the reality and judging righteous judgment, that mere Sensibility is

very apt to be accredited with a worth it has not, and genuine worth to be hidden from our eyes because it does not glow and flush in the vivid lights and colours of Sensibility.

Two persons may be brought together under the mightiest emotional influence—say of the sublimest sacred music, on some grand theme of creation or of salvation, when all that Genius can conceive, and all that Art can execute, conspire to produce the sounds that have power to speak to us in a voice worthy of God, to raise us to awe and reverence, to fill us with ineffable longings after goodness, to melt down our whole being into a sense of infinite peace, to take the prisoned soul and lap it in Elysium ; and the one may vibrate to every movement, as though his soul had wandered from him, and with no remembrance of care or clog was floating upon airs of Heaven ; whilst the other may give faint perceptible response, if any, and seem rather striving to understand than lost in adoration. Yet, let the scene be changed, the magic sounds be hushed, the vulgar necessities of life returned to, and he who was enraptured in the cathedral may be peevish in the street, unhinged, fretful, dissatisfied and bitter ; the face of the angel is quite gone, the atmosphere of Heaven is swept from around the soul—no strength, no endurance, no sweetness, no loftiness remain—the inspiration has died away, and the temper is as open to quick irritations, to selfish annoyances, jealousies, and petty offences as ever was Saul to the incursion of dark passions, and the broodings of an evil spirit after David's harp had



ceased : whilst on the other hand he who had listened without visible emotion may struggle to retain what he had struggled to receive, and become gentle, earnest, and chastened in loving fear lest the softness should vanish from his heart, the elevation from his spirit.

Two persons may gaze together upon the same scene. The one may feel himself as in the Temple not made with hands, and the heart beat, and the lips part in murmured prayer, as though God alone could be associated with that sublimity and loveliness ; whilst the other looks on unmoved, or perhaps mechanically and wearisomely speaks of heights and distances, colours and outlines, and other material and measurable properties. And yet, let a sudden cloud-curtain fall upon that glory, let the mists hide it, let the sore discomforts of wind and wet and weariness ; with the danger of an unknown track, take possession of the scene, and all the patience and support, the helpfulness and cheerfulness of trust may come from him who stood unmoved, and all the repining, impatience, and petulant impiety, the sense of utter and unalleviated wretchedness, belong to him who so lately had stood as on a mountain apart to pray, and to whom the elements had seemed as the Ministers and Messengers of God.

Two persons may read the same fiction : and the one grow intimate with the characters as with living beings ; receive upon his own heart the shock of their sorrows and the glow of their joys ; resent their wrongs and rejoice in their goodness, and follow them with a sense of pathetic approval through all the

pictured description of their battle with circumstance, their dignity under insult, their struggle with hope deferred, their generosity to the undeserving, their unwearying love through trials that might well be more than enough for mortal strength ;—and the other read coldly or reservedly, as though he was sceptical of so much goodness, or conscious that he was dealing with shadows, and must be economical of his emotions. Yet the one who took the ideal picture for reality, and gave himself up to its images as all true and natural, may not be the one who would most readily forget himself, or forgive an injury, or exercise self-denial in painful and revolting circumstances, or seek out distress, or sit by death-beds in poor men's houses, or do anything else that is human, dutiful, and spiritual amid trying accompaniments from which Sensibility recoils.

Two persons may be brought under the power of the same representation of God and of His Truth, of the gracious but severe light of His Glory that shines in the face of Christ, of His Goodness as our Father, of His Severity as the Holy Spirit of our conscience, who seeks in full paternal love to conform us entirely to Himself, with the application of these truths and facts to life, death, and judgment: the one may hear with sighs and aspirations, with mingled throbs of penitence and gratitude within the quickened sense of an eternal life; the other not easily reached by any religious passion, yet honouring any feeling of reality and lending a reverent ear to what seems true and right. And the one may go away much

satisfied with what he has felt, regarding his Sensibilities as his sacrifice, and thanking God that fire from on high has kindled the offering on the living altar ; the other with a calm and solemn purpose to make that sacrifice of *himself* which is his reasonable service, to conform himself to the right by earnest effort, and to subdue the evil by patient force of will. The one accessible to every appeal and responding on every chord of feeling, may yet carry away no deep sense of want, no fixed desire to be lowly, pure, forbearing, proof against provocation, full of high obedience, and steadfast to God ; whilst the other, though with few emotions, less kindled, less elated, and perhaps on that account less self-disguised, yet with a serious hold upon reality, may carry away a purpose of self-conquest, of the subordination of sense and sensibility to the faithful work and living sacrifice which make the spirit and the truth of worship.

Yet, though we thus may have ample experience that feelings and sensibilities can exist apart from real worth and Christian endeavour, this is not to forget that feelings and sensibilities have their own great place in the spiritual economy of God. The air we breathe, the light we enjoy, do not lose their essential value because we may so breathe in self-indulgence, so defile the light by deeds of darkness, that if we were spiritually sensitive every breath would be heavy with compunction, and every sunbeam strike us with an angry glare. God's gifts may be abused, but though then to have them is for the

time no spiritual gain, yet to part with them would be utter death. God's own forces within the soul may, through our selfish in exertion, become to us a mere emotional entertainment; they may serve no farther end than just to vary the consciousness of him who receives them, to regale him with a succession of new sensations and excitements which have no action beyond themselves. God's inspirations might even come to be sought wherever they are most likely to be found—in Nature, in Art, in Poetry, in Eloquence, in Music, in Architecture, in pathetic circumstances—for the sake of the inward rapture they afford, and be but as the very lovely song of one who hath a pleasant voice, and can play well upon an instrument. Yet, grossly abused as in that case the Divine influences would be, reduced to the level of a sensual indulgence, this would only show that our very highest privileges, instead of leading us to a good holier than themselves, may be made to stand in the place of that good, and so exclude the very ends for which they were given. A man's heart may be as a theatre, on which many beautiful operations, many awful forces of God's Spirit are brought to bear; and yet the man himself be no more transfigured, or built up, or permanently imbued with spiritual beauty and power than the canvas on which in a magical array a long succession of colours and images are thrown. But that is no reason why we should aggravate our faithlessness, and wilfully despise what we have sinfully abused. The fact, that we, or others, can reduce the action

of God upon our nature to that of some sweet and lovely voice which makes a passing melody in our hearts and is forgotten when it dies upon the air ; our misuse of the instigations of our Father, or still worse our presumptuous appropriation of them as if they were *ours*, as if they were signs of *our* goodness and not promptings of His Spirit—all this must not be permitted to discredit the spiritual emotions in their legitimate uses, as the prophetic part of our being, witnesses in us to a pure and heavenly destiny, living incentives to exertion, imparted directly by the Father of Spirits in personal intreaty with our own, and when not dishonoured by our lives as their own exceeding great reward. It is base enough to lose a gift of God, to make a sensual poison of our spiritual food, without spurning at it as a temptation and offence. Our religious emotions, if taken for what they really are, the movings of God's Spirit within ours, and if held fast by our conscience and our will, as Jacob in his spiritual time would not part with God, until we receive all their meaning, and win all their blessing, are indeed the living appeals of Grace, the ministers of the Most High, yea, the Most High Himself ministering to us ; but if taken for what they are not, for graces in us instead of the Grace of God, for virtues in *us* instead of inspirations from *Him*, then indeed they become fatal misleaders, melancholy examples of spiritual delusion and waste, of God's Spirit presumptuously arrogated, of light turned to purposes of darkness, of salt that has lost its savour, and



corrupts where it should purify. We could not without infinite loss dispense with our religious sensibilities, and yet we must not in the smallest measure regard them as ours, unless they are constantly growing because they are constantly honoured. The law of our spiritual health, that is, the law of our salvation, in this matter is definite and clear. Every good feeling that we have has its own action and its own object, in God or Man, and until it moves towards and rests on these, it is but a waste of God's holy power. Every emotion of love which God may kindle in a thousand ways, is but a luxury of sentiment, a mere suffusion of transient colour flushed on a sentient tablet, unless some one is better loved, unless some one, it may be God, it may be man, is better served through the healthy vigour of that love. Without this, we are not strengthened by what we have felt, we are weakened by it; we are reduced in our most vital parts to the insignificance and surface display of automatic life. Every throb of penitence is but a convulsion that leaves us feebler than we were, the force of God rending our nature with no real response from us, until it shows its efficacy in the doing of those good things which before we had failed to do, and in the holding us back from those evil things which before we had done. No emotion is justified that spends its strength upon itself, and is consumed without altering our personal relations to any spiritual being, or giving any new action to the conscience and the will. Nor, again, though our purpose of self-improvement was the strongest, is it by

the enjoyment of our own feelings, or even by concentrated action on ourselves, that health comes to any soul. It is by earnest looking on the face of Nature that the sense of beauty awakens in us ; but he who delights in Nature with no perception of the living spirit it reveals is surely an idolater, living in a blind indulgence. It is not by brooding over our own hearts that we dispel the impurity of our hearts, but by looking into the face of the Holy God. It is not by private arguments and closet reasonings that we obtain a genial feeling towards all the world, but by going forth and looking into the kindly faces of men, and coming into acquaintance with their sorrows, and doing some good, making some sacrifice for their sake, sowing our living seed broadcast, and reaping it a thousandfold. It is not even through self-examination that we ever come rightly to know ourselves ; it is by letting holier and better Beings look in upon us, and flood our darkness with their light. The organs and sensibilities that fit us for all this, God Himself supplies, but unless we rightly divide the word and work of life, He prompting and we acting, then though we may love these religious sensibilities, and repeat them, and even get them up as an emotional indulgence, in all this we are but profanely using God Himself as a passing excitement, as one who hath a thrilling touch, and can play well upon the mystic instrument of our nature.

Yet how largely is this the treatment we give to Religion, and even the only way we look to it for aid ! How often are the mighty forces of God

brought to bear upon the soul for no real action! Certain chords of the spiritual instrument are struck, and certain strains of spiritual feeling issue forth, but the whole action consists in the awakening of transient frames, and all the responses are emotional. We seek to strengthen faculties and principles that are purely active, and owe their vigour to their use, as much as does an arm or a limb, by arguments, by persuasions, by theoretic statements, by prayers, and eloquence, and words. I am not undervaluing these—they have their own great place—but not proximately by these do men become good servants of God, good soldiers of Jesus Christ. There is not the slightest difference between the strengthening of any spiritual faculty we have, faith, hope, or charity, and of any one of our bodily instruments; to exercise it is to strengthen it; in its action is its health; and without this, treat your spiritual faculties as you will, the more you nurse them, and tend them, and look after them, the more will they weaken and perish, the less will they give you of a healthy religious life in loving, serving, and trusting God and man, and the more will they become diseased and obtrusive claimants upon their own account. It is of such the Prophet gives a description as from the mouth of God: "They speak to one another, saying, Come, I pray you, and hear what is the Word that cometh forth from the Lord, and they come as my people come, and they sit as my people before thee, and lo, thou art unto them as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an

instrument; for they hear thy words but they do them not." Religion is the life of man conformed to the life of God, and there is absolutely no power in the mere presentation of truths and feelings to endow us with great attributes of character, with the strength of right endeavour, with patience in suffering, with conquest over ourselves, with habits of consideration and forbearance, with hope against hope. Some men *read* to strengthen their faith, to bring them the conviction of God; some *pray* to sustain their tried devotion; some take large measures of counsel and sympathy for religious comfort and to dispel spiritual fears; all potent means of help, not one of them to be long suspended, but as a regimen of life, no more than the music that stirs the heart and thrills along the nerves. A great trust in God grows upon obedience, and becomes quite immovable when *through doing His Will* we get some real experience of an unexpected peace that passeth understanding. A true enthusiasm comes from a soul that has great experiences. The feelings that *prompt* to religious life are God's only; the feelings that come out of a religious life are both God's and ours, and this is the only experience that can breathe a divine assurance through us. And so God's sollicitings and promptings are but the measures of our restlessness, until they find their rest in accomplishing that whereunto they were given.

And hence the apparent anomaly that men who are simply worldly men, with no directly spiritual purpose, whose conscience is in no way refined or

exacting, often seem freer and happier, more earnest in their own work, and present even a more inviting type of character, a robuster strength, a manlier life, when compared with the pallid feebleness of those in whom conscience is quick but faithless, who are always feeling themselves to be under punishment, in the troubled condition of those who know God's will and do it not. Did not our Lord mean this when he said to all who toy and dally with the religious feelings: "The publicans and sinners shall go into the Kingdom of Heaven before you." For there is in these a *reserve* of unexhausted strength, of honest ground; their consciences at least are not daily weakened by the ineffectual throes that have torn us and left us as we were; they do not grieve God's spirit by pretended obedience or by false excuses; and beneath their rude and carnal life there is a well of purer water which has not yet been tried in vain. May God take from us the semblance and give us the substance of religion, that when we pray our souls may not be acting upon themselves but meeting the living God Himself in true communion, that when we hear His Voice it may awaken us to rise up and do the Works of our Father! "For if any be a hearer of the Word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass; for he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed."



## XV.

### Worse than an Infidel.

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I TIMOTHY v. 8 :

“If any man provide not for his own, and especially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.”

THE Apostle had immediate reference to the obligation of children and kindred to support the declining years of those with whom Nature had allied them. Two claims would thus be met, the sacred claim of Family, and the just claim of Society not to be burdened with those who, having blood-relations adequate to the charge, ought to be taken to a dearer and more domestic care than the public charity of the community or the Church. “If any,” says St. Paul, “that are destitute have children or younger kindred, let these learn first to show their piety at home and to requite their parents, for that is good and acceptable before God.” How noble is the comprehensiveness of that religion, which in the interests of the individual soul, of spirit and of truth, makes it part of our fidelity to know no relationships but with the Father of spirits, and yet makes our willing-

ness to recognize the duties and the trusts which grow out of the human ties and connections, which are to be kept out of sight when the soul seeks to hear the voice of the God of Truth, the test of whether we have heard that voice aright, in a real fellowship with the spirit of Him whom no man knows until he knows Him as a Father, and if the Father of any one of us, then the Father of us all. In the Sermon on the Mount these two sides of spiritual fidelity, that the individual soul listens to God alone, yet proves that it has heard Him in spirit and in truth by its readiness to be as a brother to those to whom He is a Father, are distinctly marked, and are involved indeed in the first words of our Lord's Prayer. The single eye fixed on its source is full of light, and the children of the Father in Heaven must show their lineage by their love; yet Christ cautions us against permitting the soul's individual truth to be injured by temporal relations and family persuasions; and Paul cautions us against permitting the obligations of family to be injured by the concentration or absorption of the individual soul. And naturally do these contrasted cautions come respectively from Christ and from Paul; for Christ had to contend against the unspiritual influence of family prejudice, of ancestral expectations, of home biases, whilst Paul had to contend against the fanatical influence of a transcendental mood, of an enthusiastic impulse that in a phrensy of spirit was for taking instant wing to Heaven, and in the giddy rapture of the new ideas forgetting the old moralities.

Yet how perfect is the harmony between them ! Each guards against the violation or neglect of that side of the spiritual whole most likely to be forgotten, in the temptation of the time, by those he was addressing. Christ is providing for the inward life and truth of the individual soul, for its enlightenment by direct intercourse with the God of Truth. St. Paul is providing for the full human action of the soul, when it has received the Truth of God, within its legitimate sphere of duty and of charge, in that foremost field of social responsibility which God, who places us in families, assigns to all in the affections, and in the opportunities, of Nature. "If any man," says Christ, "love father or mother, son or daughter, more than me, he is not worthy of me." "If any man," says St. Paul, "provide not for his own, and especially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith and is worse than an infidel." Perfection lies not in the force of single feelings, but in the blending and harmony of contrasts ; and these two frames, a soul listening to none but God, affections listening willingly to every natural claim of earth, the faithful spirit and the kindred heart, must unite to make a Christian man.

In addition to the responsible claims for active and sympathetic co-operation which come to us from those on our own level, who upon equal grounds and with meeting hearts travel with us the way of life, we are most of us placed for the larger portion of existence—and for spiritual enlargement and discipline it is the most favoured position we could hold—between

the contrasted claims of two portions of human life, neither of which is our own—the claims of Age and of Youth. On the one side the claims of natural piety, of a love enhanced by reverence, from those who are older, better, wiser than ourselves, or who, altogether independently of their characters, into which we do not rudely look, are consecrated to us by the design of God that years *should* give the qualities that win honour and service ; on our other side are the claims of those who, of tenderer years and more virgin spirit, hold *to us* the same relations of love and duty which we hold to those who through long experience have purged their eyes from many delusions and in the fitnesses of Providence have acquired a more spiritual gaze, and are, indeed, nearer than we are to the Heavenly World. Oriental religion saw in the brightness, in the ready affections without respect of persons, in the springing aspiration, in the gleaming life of childhood, in its slowness to recognize the limitations of social distinctions and physical condition, the traces of a former and celestial existence, a lost glory of which these survivals and vestiges remained. As our own great platonic poet has expressed it—

“ Heaven lies about us in our infancy :  
Not in entire forgetfulness,  
And not in utter nakedness,  
But trailing clouds of glory do we come  
From God who is our Home.”

And Christ himself has said, “ Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not, for of such is the

kingdom of Heaven ; and unless ye be converted and become as little children ye shall not enter into the kingdom of God." And old age ought surely to be an approach to Heaven again ; not then, as in childhood's innocence, through unconscious instincts, but through the wisdom of a holy will, through a nature purified and chastened by a large trial of devout trusts, and the refining processes of life. For the middle and the larger portion of existence we hold a place between these two contrasted periods, and as we sympathize with and have living connections with them both do we keep our own hearts right, with *affections* fresh and young, with the sentiment of *reverence* ever humble and aspiring—a mingled gladness and meekness of nature that is the noblest and the happiest condition of a spiritual being.

It may be a problem, varying for each man with the opportunities and conditions of his life, in what proportions we ought to divide ourselves between these interests, to distribute through them our disposable energy. How broad, for instance, should be that band of equal hearts with whom in close brotherhood and mutual help we meet the toil and share the burden—whether those who are the equal friends of our spirit, dealing freely with matters that affect our personal responsibility, can be many or must be few : how far, again, we should connect ourselves with the habits, the necessities, perhaps the infirmities, of older minds, and yield something of the activities of life, of the adventures of thought, for the sake of ministering to those who have claims upon our dutiful



service, and who with such wisdom as they have gathered are now placed by God where they look upon the world only through "the loopholes of retreat;" and how far, again, by fresh sympathies and friendships with more youthful minds, the echoes of our own earlier years, which are often the oracles of the *purser* spirit, should be reawakened in hearts that *else* might become worn and faded, and fall away in the dull conflicts of the world from the first virgin inspirations of undaunted conscience,—for tame experience can so array the practical difficulties as to drug conscience or intimidate desire, that it is often to the unspoiled soul of inexperience that God most distinctly points the noblest way.

These varying claims may require delicate adjustment, and perhaps present a difficulty as to the disposal of time in the circumstances of each case; but there is something wrong in the nature, or unhappy in the lot, of him who does not hold all these connections with the waxing and the waning of human hearts, who does not feel each strain of this threefold cord of life—the strong friendships meeting on common ground, trusting others as one's self, leaning or supporting, giving or taking, as the need may be,—and along with this equal life that spirit of humanity which, through unselfish sympathy, makes itself of every age, entering into the mellow feelings and sobered wisdom, reverencing the scars of conflict, in those who have left the world behind them, and yet with as fresh a faith, as eager a welcome, for those on whom its earliest promises are vaguely streaming

through golden mists, as when its orient hopes first opened on ourselves. No one can provide for his own, for the spiritual administration of those of his own house, whose spirit of sympathy and insight is not thus generous and large. To some of those with whom God and Nature have allied him he will turn a dark side if he is shut up in himself, in his own form of being, if he holds not the keys of spiritual understanding which unlock for him the secrets and mysteries of all ages, and open the rich life of older and of fresher hearts to flow into his own.

And if he who provides not for the outward well-being of his own, and that with no grudging or ungracious hand, has denied the faith which feeds all the duties and charities of life, and is in this respect worse than an infidel, for he has fallen short of the obvious responsibilities even of a heathen man, to say nothing of the boundless love of the life in Christ,—there are also spiritual necessities in his home, deeper wants than belong to the maintenance or the beauty of the external life—hungering and thirsting natures to be sustained and cherished with whatever is needful to bring out the fulness of power and joy, to provide for which all other provisions are but accessory, and which, if he overlooks or disowns, he denies the faith which makes the outward and material the occasion and instrument of the inward and spiritual, and providing only for mortal parts of our nature, he is “dead while he liveth.”

In all the compass of devout beliefs there is no more vital acknowledgment of the heart to God than

the perception of the way of His Love expressed in the words, "Thy gentleness would make us great." There is this gentleness, this adaptation to the feeble and growing powers of man, in the manner in which Providence, whilst expanding our affections to the whole human race, yet limits our sphere of direct responsibility, gives us unbounded love but a bounded field of personal labour, suffers not the extent of our work to press too heavily on the energies of hope, and even secludes from observation the bosom of families, gathering under a domestic roof all for whom we are directly chargeable, cutting out from the field of the world a sheltered homestead, where by faithfulness and holy care all things fair and good may be made to blossom, and the evil thing, if God wills, kept away from its borders. Our affections, indeed, are indefinitely expansive, but not so our faculties of direct effort or of personal guardianship, and our love is consequently vastly wider than our responsibility. He is therefore not a more perfect, but a less perfect man, who has no limited affections, as they are called. With definite affections lies the intensest work of life and love. Philanthropy is more languid than patriotism, a less energetic and concentrated sentiment. Mankind does not appeal to conscience, to the responsible sense of effort and of power, like the well-defined conditions and vivid images of home. The rule of the Apostle marks most accurately the general Law of Love and the graduated scale of its intenser power: "Do good unto all men, according as you have opportunity,

especially unto those that are of the household of faith." The opportunity determines the measure of responsibility. God gives to every man who has kindred a definite ministry for his spirit, a home mission for his affections, whose limited and manageable extent, if it quickens hope with prospects of success, also binds conscience fast to a fixed work which it may on no account refuse. It is the portion of good which *most* plainly our Heavenly Father has given us to do—a garden separated from the vast wilderness of the world, small enough for successful cultivation, where the fruits of our labour may be marked, and whose barrenness our gifts will not stimulate, nor our tears water, in vain.

To qualify us to provide spiritually for our own, to make provision for the higher life of those of our own house, it is essential first that our idea of a home should include the whole being and life of man, that our religious conception of *what is a home* should by its own truth and fulness be constantly presenting to us the image of our duties. This is, indeed, the intended function of all models, of all ideals, which, observe, are only *adequate ideas*, as of Christ himself our fullest end, that they make definite to conscience its aim and responsibility. The highest moral picture in our thoughts is just the work we have to do with the realities of our life. It is as the artist's conception, which his mind and hand have to transfer to the realm of visible things. God gives every fair vision that we may work it out with the materials around us. Whether we can outwardly accomplish it may

not rest with us alone to determine ; other hearts, other wills, may deny us the needful co-operation,—but we must never abandon the effort. With our best care our work may fall to pieces ; but we must begin again with patience and love unfailing. To give clearness and prominency to what we understand by the *moral idea* of home, we shall give strong and even coarse expression to the opposite idea. If there are any to whom their home is *only* a place of physical accommodation and personal convenience, where they lodge, and eat, and sleep, and have their comforts, and their connection with which must for these purposes be maintained, is there not infidelity to the higher nature in that house, if there is no trace of the spiritual man, of that which alone makes him a man, *there* is the very home of the man, which of all the spots on earth must be the outward impress and image of himself?

There is no faith in anything *distinctively* human which that man in his most intimate habits is not practically disowning. What a difference between the worth and dignity of such a home, however luxuriously equipped, and of the most solitary chamber, however bare, which the lonely student consecrates by noble aims, where at least his soul has a home, and is visited by high thoughts and kindling hopes,—or of the most struggling household where duty and strong purpose make a blessing for each hour, and the sore trials that God sends are met with loving and courageous hearts. The place where our spirit enters into the most earnest fellowship with



other spirits, the place where whatever is brightest and highest in us acts most powerfully, and leaves the strongest impress of itself, the place where we have sought to bring together the conditions of noblest life, and to remove with careful hand the causes of unhappiness and evil, where whatever is generous and patient, brave, merciful, and forgiving in us is known and felt as it can be nowhere else,—that is the home of a true man; and to strip our home of such sacred investiture is to live as something lower than a man. “He who *lives* in pleasures,” says St. Paul, “is dead while he liveth;” and he whose associations with his home are not spiritual, borrowed from love and thought, has in the troubled heart of this earthly life no image of the peaceful and the stable eternity.

The directest and most responsible workings of our characters, the most intimate connections we hold with the inward life of others, supply the higher elements of our idea of a home; and there is no age, no member, none so young and so helpless, of all that are gathered under one roof that they may not connect themselves and their life with this idea. To bear one another's burdens is the surest way to grow to the stature of a perfect man, for it is to share in every variety of human experience, and to escape every maimed type. The veriest child has a ministry, and vast is the work it often does in calling out disinterested effort, in keeping alive the song of perpetual youth in careworn bosoms; and to itself its home is richer, is more a home, with every new ser-

vice its duty and its love can pay, with every larger fellowship it can win, or unselfish affection it bestows. Children, I will not say, can be *made* to participate in this best feeling of home, for in fact they adopt it with the utmost readiness, and under its influence can make sacrifices with glad and eager spirit. And with what a force does this home spirit work in the intercourse of those who are entering life together, when the sister is the safeguard of the brother, his most intimate counsellor and closest friend, his salvation and protection, on whose indulgence he can rely in all extremities, but whose purity and moral grace go with him to chasten him insensibly, and bring him back to her confidence unsoiled. If ever there should come a time here as in other lands, which God avert, when the bonds of families can be readily broken, it will be from a disregard of this early action of the higher sentiments. Those who can compare the present with one or more former generations will perhaps perceive a tendency now to postpone for the young the period of their personal responsibility. Such postponement may in some directions work for good ; but the time comes when if there are any whom God has placed in families who yet do nothing to sustain the inward strength of others, they have no life of faith ; they are living to no purpose ; they permit God to provide His greatest opportunities, and offer them in vain.

In what concerns those of our own house the Apostle has given us a warning, faintly echoing a deeper warning of our Lord's, that Christian faith

may have *there* its most critical trials, its most searching disappointments : a man's spiritual foes may be those of his own household ; and we must rather do what is right with a religious perseverance and trust than entertain confident expectations of prosperous results, always ready as often as God breaks our hopes to gather up again even the fragments, that nothing may be lost. We work for uncertain issues, uncertain within limited periods. Wherever moral elements, the characters and the wills of others, are concerned, God alone can calculate results. What we *know* is the temper in which we ought to work : what we can *do* for our own, is to provide that by no failure in us of patience or of love shall the elements of strength or peace in any bosom be left without the support that a true heart can give them. We cannot answer for consequences ; neither must we forget that what we call consequences are only the first beginnings of endless trains, that there are other consequences yet to come in an interminable series, that God worketh in all things, that His Providence knows no defeat ; and that there are two things we must do, and ever be prepared to do *anew*, if we would provide for our own, and not deny the faith, the hopeful and patient spirit of the Son of God. We must let no sin of another, no self-righteousness of our own, close up our human heart, our humility and mercy ; we must present a brave spirit to the calamities that may come upon our home, and suffer no needless shadows from our own being to fall upon the glad life of others. If God is good to the unthankful and

the evil, and calls upon *us* to be universal in our mercy as He is universal in His, that we may be the children of our Father who is in heaven : if evil and unthankful ourselves, we yet cannot extend the hopefulness of the Divine patience towards the whole brotherhood of man, surely at least in the narrower and dearer circle of our own, the Father will not own us for true children if we hide ourselves from our own flesh, and let not our light shine and our tears fall for the just and for the unjust. "If any man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual restore such a one in the spirit of meekness, considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted." "Lord, *how often* shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times? Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times : but, Until seventy times seven." God forbid that creatures so poor as we are, showing some pitiable weakness, and offending every day, should establish a rule against ourselves, should refuse the support of a brotherly hope and pity to the feeble elements of virtue in any being looking up from his sins and desiring to be better ; that we, always frail, and only sometimes kindling to what is good, should break bruised reeds, and quench smoking flax. The priest and the Levite who passed by the wounded stranger, might, to those of their own Jerusalem, show as Samaritans beside us.

And in the sorrows and troubles that will come upon us, not from man, but from God, we must "provide for our own," for the unbroken energies and free spirit "of those of our own house," by living a

life of *faith* and courage. Next to carrying others successfully through the assaults of evil, the noblest thing we can do for them is to carry them bravely and with unshadowed hearts through the conflicts of calamity. It is almost an equal greatness, and an equal glory, to keep the spirit hopeful as to keep it pure, remembering the apostolic *order*, "first pure, then peaceful." And it is often a less injury to put a temptation in its way which it can beat aside by its own will, than to drop a cloud on its heart, a shadow on its path. For purity within can avert an evil temptation; but it is a rare strength that can support the glad energies of life in the daily presence of another's feebleness and hopelessness of heart. And there is a blessed power in one healthy and brave nature to make itself a centre of light and confidence, to strip away the exaggerations of our moments of despondency, to move mountains from off the spirit by earnest and cheerful force, to sustain those views of life and of its goal, which give us strength to walk together through the valley of every shadow, by faith as by sight, to our home in heaven, and beneath our heavenly Father's eye!



## XVI.

### Diversities of Gifts co-operating by One Spirit.

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I COR. xii. 4, 6 :

“There are diversities of gifts, but the same spirit. There are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all.”

How manifold the operations by which the same spirit, the Spirit of our God, works out the destinies of humanity! The end is one, the means innumerable; the purpose constant, the operations infinitely diversified; the directing spirit always the same, the human instruments various as their uses, and fashioned to do the work of Him who worketh all in all! Who is competent to discover and unfold the gradual working out of God's great Plan, to describe it as it exists at any one moment in the delicate and intricate complication of our social condition, or as it is taken up and carried on by the successive generations of men? Who, through all the action of the human drama, its scene the wide earth, its time from the birth of history to the present hour, is able to trace out an outward development of the Plot of Providence? Who could pass in review before us the distinct ages and epochs of humanity, and exhibit to us at each

stage both the co-existent relations of the body social, and how the great features which characterize each period are but the gradual unfoldings of the Order of God, through which amidst diversities of operation the same spirit is continuously conducting the education of mankind? And yet the discovery of such a Plan must be possible, else is there no Providence in Heaven, and no social science conceivable on earth. The history of the world, if we could see it in one view, should present the same connected series of growth, with occasional retardation; the same carrying on of the Past into the Future, dropping nothing by the way; the same consistent, though intricate, flow of character and attainment, as would the history of one mind if we supposed it to exist from Adam until now. History, indeed, only exhibits the several periods of our personal growth on a larger scale, presenting the same qualities, the same stages of character, in their slower developments in the life of the race, which are also presented in the narrow compass of the life of the individual. The order of development which a single man observes, is also the order of development which humanity observes. History only lengthens the time in which the separate elements of character continue on the stage in their period of partial predominance, giving to each phase of the individual when we trace it in the life of the race a colossal proportion. History bears to biography the relation that mankind bears to individual man. In the history of mankind, as in the biography of an

individual, there may be periods of inaction and even of apparent retrocession, currents that seem to be working against the main stream, seasons of arrested growth, of physical and spiritual interaction which seem to bring all things to a stop—Middle Ages like a pause at noonday—and these too only the diversities of operation by which the same God carries on His progressive scheme, long rests or troubled dreams, times of partial disturbance or retirement, from which humanity awakes to the more active service of a well-filled day. Certain it is that from each of these sleeps, or mysterious pauses, humanity has started up like a giant refreshed, and taken a stride that placed it at once at a glorious distance from where it lay down to slumber or to pause, till some season of disorder, or arrest of life, had passed away; realizing by that sudden advancement as much of progress as the whole period of preceding inactivity would have produced at the ordinary pace. It is the noblest use of history to afford materials for discovering this Plan of God for the education of our race, and in that magnified image of man which the large mirror of time holds up to present broadly visible and distinct the successive stages of the growth of mind, the order of succession in which the human spirit becomes a new reflection of the Mind of the Eternal. When this plan is seen in history then will history be as that larger book to which our present Bible will afford the key, exhibiting God working out over the wide earth and for man universal, the spiritual scheme which in its stages He

has indexed in the Scriptures, and in its result by way of sample has prefigured in Christ. When will history be studied with this view? Then only shall we have a philosophy of history, or a social science that deserves the name. Then only shall Providence display distinctly its vast outline and its calm proportions on the ample sheet, and each man perceiving that the world has a plan, that all things are working together, and that nothing hangs loose, will discover also that *himself* is an instrument in God's hands, that *his* life is necessary to God's purposes, and will rouse himself to discern his office, and to do his part.

In the diversity of operations which the same Spirit conducts in the education of humanity, the two interests which God has concurrently to guard and to promote are, first, the progress of the race, and secondly, the spiritual integrity of the individual human beings who are His instruments. The last of these is never sacrificed to the first, however to us it may sometimes seem to be so, and whole strata of men to be cast aside like pottery spoiled in the making. I shall confine myself to the individual aspects of this great moral and providential view, referring to the general plan only so far as is necessary to elevate and give a dignity to individual character.

As God's Providence at each moment embraces two objects, one in reference to each individual spirit, and one in reference to mankind, to a progressive civilization, so each individual ought to take two views of his own life—one in reference to the place

that God has assigned him in the world, and one in reference to his own mind and soul. On behalf of Society in the great subdivision and co-operation of the world's labour, each man has a definite post to fill, a definite work to do ; and if he takes no specific social employment, however engrossed he may be with his own cultivation, he is letting the great work of Providence go on before his eyes whilst he stands by a self-occupied spectator ; nay, he lets it go on imperfectly because he stands idle, and will not render the human service which the Lord of the Vineyard has fitted him, and in fitting hired him, to perform. On behalf of *himself* each man has a great work to do distinct from that of his social place ; and it is, according to his opportunity, to educate his own nature in the full, harmonious, and proportionate development of all its parts. These two interests are intimately connected, though separate, and neither can be performed in the right spirit, nor with full effect, if the other is neglected.

The special work a man has to do for society, the professional office and labour of the man, is for the most part extremely definite and limited, and in a narrow walk. It is to confine himself to one field of thought : it is to gain a mastery over one range of subjects : it is to acquire an intimate knowledge of everything that concerns or can affect one class of interests : it is to acquaint himself with the principles and become expert in the operations, which belong to one set of actions : it is often for a long life to appear in one place, to do one work, to render one



kind of service, for which natural tendencies, or education and experience, have created a surpassing aptitude. The professional service then, for the most part, would supply only a very partial education. It contemplates one kind of action. It aims at one kind of excellence. It moves in its own sphere, abstracted and apart from the other concerns of men, and does its own work as though there was no other work in the world. All this would be well, and enough, if the whole influence that a man exerts upon others was exerted within his professional walk, or if professional work exhausted the whole man, leaving no residue of neglected capabilities, or again if Political Economy represented, what it never professed to represent, *the whole* interests of society, to be the absolute and unqualified science of human life, instead of the limited and hypothetical science of a special department, separated in thought, as in life it cannot be separated from other departments, for the practical purpose of a pure observation and a scientific analysis; for before we can understand the combined result of all the influences acting upon man, we must understand the unmodified result of each acting singly; but as none of these suppositions is true, it is no more good for a man's work in life to be altogether a professional one, than it is good for man to be alone. Exclusive occupation leads to exclusive views and exclusive sympathies. It narrows and illiberalizes the mind, making it technical and formal, more inclined to attend to the rules and precedents of the one kind of business that is constantly before

it than to the wide aims and principles on which human interests rest, and in harmony with which the same business would come to be conducted if it was regarded in its connections with the whole and as part of the common weal. It accustoms a man to the contemplation of one set of interests until it is impossible that he should not assign to them an exaggerated importance ; it demands from him the sharpened exercise of one set of faculties until he loses command over the rest, and almost a knowledge of their existence. By its exclusiveness of thought and action it cripples and stints the man, and curtails him of his fair proportions. He is led by the habits of his mind and life to look upon everything as it may concern his own particular occupation, instead of looking on his own occupation in its connections with the wide interests of man and the vast system of God ; he looks upon the whole in reference to a part, instead of giving the part its instrumental place and its relative importance.

And not the individual only, but society at large, suffers deeply from this exclusiveness, from the one-sidedness of its professional servants. They carry into their profession a narrow spirit, unmodified by other interests, ignorant of vast fields of thought and life, which often restricts the profession itself to one half the good it might realize for the world. They carry into society when called to take their part in its general measures, the same partial comprehension, the same technical habits, and even the same class morality. A lawyer, if he is nothing but a lawyer,

is useful only in the existing relations of law to life, which of course relatively to what might be are often in an imperfect state, whilst himself is the greatest obstacle to every better. A merchant, if he is nothing but a merchant, who coins his mind as well as his time, and grows rich in money as he grows bankrupt in thought, will impoverish the whole tone of provincial society and conversation in which his position gives him a leading part, where consideration for him suggests, and excludes, the topics on which men may fitly speak. An ecclesiastic, if he is nothing but an ecclesiastic, will be the most unfit interpreter of Providence that it is possible to conceive ; he will have no mind to acknowledge that in its manifold operation of human and of heavenly influence there is the same Spirit ; he will postpone reality to form, and exaggerate official acts, what he calls means of Grace, until he makes the institutions of Religion a sorrow and lamentation to the spiritual, a scorn and by-word to the shrewd ; he will limit holiness of life to a certain unpractical description of character, and sacredness of feeling to a certain class of abstractions, of unreal dealings with the future ; and he will misrepresent and libel the present and man's relations to it, until in his piety he becomes impious, and in his ignorance blasphemes the Creation and its God. Society, then, is concerned that while each man takes his place in the great combination, and fulfils the special duties of his profession, he shall carry into it a wise and large spirit only to be acquired by understanding other men and the value of their work, as

well as himself and his own ; by adding to that partial education of special faculties which his professional position requires the fuller education of himself which will bring out the sympathies of our multiform and widely gifted nature. The man who takes his post of special service, and every man ought to take one, and does its business in a style however masterly, but does nothing more, is as one of the wheels in a machine—he helps on a great work indeed, but he is nothing himself. The work could not go on without him : but what is *he* apart from that particular work ; or in the other influences he exerts upon mankind ? A man of imperfect formation, whose nature only gives him some fractional part of the service and the joy it ought—a man in whom the image of his God is marred, in whom, by the fulness of his own care and love, not even the Divine outlines are preserved.

We doubt not that many whose lot in life confines them, or seems to confine them, to an exclusive occupation and a partial development, are alive to this disadvantage of their position with a keenly painful sensibility. Fixed by the power of circumstance in a post from which they cannot withdraw, and feeling at times the irksomeness of uniformity, the meagreness of never-ending details, they are tempted to regard their lives as without dignity, and to repine that the spirit is pressed upon and crushed by the constant weight of small unvaried engagements and reiterated cares. We doubt not that this is felt by many who seem to have no means of relief, to a degree that dissatisfies them with their daily occupa-

tions, and haunts their peace of mind. But no man ought to have this wearing feeling in regard to his place in society. Whatever work he performs, if it is a needful work God intended that some man should do it, and if he brings to it the right spirit there need be no lack of dignity, nor of opportunity, in it. Let him only be fitted for his place, and his place will glorify him, and serve him well. We care not *what* it is—it is a part of the Plan of Providence, one of the manifold operations of the same spirit, and it cannot be spared. God requires some man to do that work, and that is assurance enough that he who does it aright may be blessed in his deed. It is certainly a legitimate elevation of our thoughts, through all the forms of service, for each one of us to view the routine of daily life not in its own meagre and separated light, but as a portion of that diversified operation of God which, in doing our own work, is helping others to do theirs, carrying social progress, the Christian civilization, through the whole family of man, and speeding by our influence the great development of character, that coming of Heaven to earth. It is legitimate elevation for the merchant to forget the narrower associations that circle him, and to regard himself as a sender of those civilizing influences which, like the spirit of God, move on the face of the waters on their blessed mission to distant lands, to rescue himself from the materializing tendencies of details and returns while he looks abroad on the beneficent connections he holds with countless hearts and homes unknown to him, and attaches to



his daily occupations the dignifying associations of human improvement and of providential design,—to break the uniformity of the phenomenal connection between his commerce and his gain, by seeing and serving the real connection between his commerce and his God.

But however our special work is capable of being elevated by such views, it is certainly true that there is a tendency in any exclusive employment or professional life to narrow and contract our nature ; and against that tendency there is no preservative except at all lawful times to step out of that narrow walk and consecrate a portion of our being to wider sympathies and larger culture. I say at all lawful times, for of course a man has no right to exhibit himself on any field but his own whilst his own is running to waste, or is less thoroughly cultivated than it ought to be. Rather than that, let him be content with the most limited sphere, doing its work perfectly, knowing that he is what he is by the grace of God, and that God will open his way. Only, if any man should feel an anxiety to obtain this larger life, and yet be so placed that it seems to be impossible, let him at least labour to retain the anxiety. It is a sign that the best part of his nature is yet alive, its aspiration and desire, and it will turn to rich account many a stray opportunity that else would present itself in vain.

The varying qualities of men, and their respective fitness for different kinds of work, must determine their several posts of service. Happy are they if

they discover it aright! Most happy if they faithfully fulfil it! He indeed is to be pitied who knows not where his place is in the world; but our pity will hardly touch the misery of him who knows it and betrays it, who will not work the work which his Heavenly Father has clearly given him to do!

And if each individual has his appointed service, the broader classes into which society is divisible must more markedly have theirs. Then woman has her special work and place. Though it is not possible to separate it from aims which belong to all alike, it is pre-eminently a function of antagonism against the hard and the worldly, a service of sympathy with whatever relates to the sufficing blessedness of the affections, and marks their immortality. It is to elevate the issues of the heart, with the interests and the duties that spring from them, above everything the world has to give,—to prevent the existence of which she makes a part from ever revolving around a false centre, around any centre but that of the holy love “which hopeth all things.” It is to keep pure the streams of our life by keeping its fountains holy, for childhood is hers, and “the child is father of the man, and our days might be bound each to each by natural piety.” It is to hold herself in meek separation from whatever is coarse in indulgence, ungentle or unforgiving in feeling. It is to make provision, by the work both of mind and hand, for the constant play and presence of life’s finer influences, to keep our existence, however poor in wealth, from sinking into the mean, the ungraced,

or the vulgar. It is to throw her whole power into the scale of sentiment against the senses, against external ambitions and vulgar cares. It is never to assist at the sacrifice of inner being to outward seeming, of the deep and quiet spirit to the superficial agitation of showy and imperfect work. It is to withdraw manhood from pomps and worldliness by showing that *her* heart is not there ; that therein is not the life of life, that she would rather share in his mind than in his gold. It is "true to the kindred points of heaven and home" to have ever ready the interpretation of the Faith that works by Love in all changes of our earthly lot ; dispersing gloom by that which is as a lighter religion, the graceful, gracious agencies of heart and spirit ; and all deeper sorrow by silent trust in that which simple goodness learns of God, by an habitual reliance on the eternal significance of whatever is pure within. We say that this is her special office, not to be sacrificed to any other, for these are her aptitudes. If she fulfils it, it is a blessed work, and the reward is great. If she fails in it because she cannot discern it, or because she is not contented with it, aiming at something else than that which has been given to her, —or yet worse,—if she disregards it, promoting, because she has no depth of heart, the false estimates and passions, the outward shows and restlessness of life, which God designed her to correct, the salt has lost its savour, and she has fallen from the glory of her place.

And if there be any who though they have sought their place have found it not, let them remember

that "they also serve who only stand and wait," remembering also that if they stand and wait, it must be to hire themselves to the first good work that offers. And who would have to wait long if he was content to follow the leadings of Providence, to take the opportunities of good as God casts them in his way? We know the value of a distinct aim in life, and of occupying a definite post, but without such no man need be idle. There is day-labour always ready, even for those who have not yet found their life-labour. Nay, vast may be the faithfulness and the blessedness of those who have only the day-labour to look to, who have to take the chance-offerings of God, to go as they are called, uncheered by the more visible dignity, the constancy and growing largeness of a work which every day takes fuller shape beneath their hands. There is enough to be done, everywhere and for all, that will not be done unless all work. Enough of ignorance to be enlightened, of sufferings to be alleviated, of helplessness to be administered unto, of sin to be sanctified, of aspirings to be kindled, of irritations calmed, and affections kept from dying; and who are found so nobly ready for this unappropriated work as those who in their devotion to that which is not their own, and yet is their own, have often no reward, as they seek none, but that which comes from Him who seeth in secret?

Behold the harvest is abundant; thrust in the sickle where you can, and gather fruit unto Life Eternal.

## XVII.

By their Fruits shall ye know them.



GALATIANS v. 22, 23 :

“The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance.”

THERE is consistency, keeping, observed by those who possess what is called *Character*. They have modes of feeling and of conduct so habitually their own that to depart from them would be in effect to change their identity. From your experience of the prevailing cast of thought and sentiment in the mind of a friend you might anticipate with an undoubting confidence the soul of his life, the *Character* of his emotions, determinations, and actions in any particular combination of circumstances, and if you have been a just observer, all the laws of spirit must fail before you can be disappointed. I do not mean that any observation of yours, whatever your insight may be, will enable you to exhaust a man's nature, to draw a defining line around its possible capacities and fruits, to limit the sphere of his inspiration and his will, for God Himself, the Source of all life, has an immediate access to that nature, and can quicken and enrich it



with an infinite variety in a way that is for ever open to Him and for ever a secret to you, but that whatever may be the unsuspected richness of his being, however he may surprise you by new forms of power, whatever sudden springs may gush out of dry places, more calculable *than these*, there will be the great constant qualities of affection and of conscience which preserve unity of being, and with controlling authority use in the service of one spirit, whatever talents God may give. By these is the foundation laid in our nature for social confidence, for personal friendship, for a peaceful unagitated assurance of the stable sympathies of mind with mind. It is because of the fixed expression that a man's character, as his countenance assumes, because of wrought and formed channels in the heart through which the living waters that have flowed so long will continue to flow on, because in a word there are unfailing certainties in the moral as in the material world that one heart rests upon another with unsuspecting trust, and would rather believe that the outward universe might depart from our past experience of it and flinch from God's ordinances, than that a spirit on which we had relied would wilfully contradict its past history, and purposely disappoint our faith. It is this that places sincerity, personal truth in all things, among the first of virtues, or at least places the violation of it among the worst of offences, the most odious because it is the most pernicious, destructive of goodness and of the world's faith in goodness; and he who is chargeable with inconsistencies, I mean of the heart, for from inconsistencies of the intellect

no man must presume to be free, he who leads others to form expectations from his character and to entrust him with hopes which he wantonly disappoints or wilfully betrays is the worker of an evil which extends far beyond the downfall of his own truth: he introduces uneasy and defiling suspicion into our thoughts and is tending to make society, with all its show of confiding intercourse, as unstable as himself; he is destroying trust in the very foundations on which the building of God in our human relations, the purest joys of life and fellowship, are laid. He who violates that harmony of being which every principled mind *consciously*, and every pure and simple heart *instinctively*, maintains, who deceives the faith of men by false colours, promises broken to *the hope*, is doing his utmost to give over the trusts and charities of our nature to the heartless scoffer at the reality of simplicity and truth, and to make human intercourse an artificial system maintained by the checks and the counter-checks of a reciprocated pretence and a reciprocated distrust. I allude now to this principle of genuine simplicity, on the preservation of which all natural growth of character, all alliance of God with a man's soul, all friendship that is worthy of the name, and all social good depends, because it clearly exhibits what we mean by confidence in the unity of spiritual being, that within it there are certain suggesting dispositions and controlling purposes which upon all its manifestations stamp a kindred character, just as in the human countenance through the fitting lights and shadows of expression

there is one distinctive aspect preserving its identity in all the changing language of the face. To the *Common Sense* of the world this consistency, which in moral directions brings a man within the range of your calculations, and enables you to determine what you may, and what you may not, expect from certain individuals, is familiarly understood. There are those of whom you would find it impossible to believe on any *reported* evidence, that they had been guilty of a mean or of a cruel act, and there are those of whom you would have to say that their *nature* must be changed before they could give hourly evidence of an elevated tone of feeling, of a spirit habitually generous and self-forgotten. In all such cases we use the common expression of the common sense, which, like all common expressions, contains the essence of Truth, and we say that so to act would be against their *natures*. Now it is this originating nature, whatever it be, however it come, which is in fact the existing character of each individual, and whose will and tendencies the outward life, when left unchecked, is drawing forth into distinct expression. It is as though we conceive, as we ought to conceive, a personal spirit lodged and ruling in the human frame, an incarnate will, using our physical members as instruments to execute its purposes, and shaping our action and demeanour after the breathings of its own desires. This spirit has a prevailing character, and the life which it prompts has a prevailing complexion. I say we ought to conceive this, apart from physiological questions of materialism or spiritualism, for the

sake of arriving at a clear idea of what for the time is the inward moral being of each man. For, in effect, there is nothing fanciful in supposing that spirits of different stamp and mould tenant the body and direct the life, that through eyes of lust and selfish passion there is an evil spirit looking out ; that at the heart of a good man's life there is an originating spirit whose natural fruit is peace, confidingness, gentleness, joy, long-suffering, and love. It is not upon the external act that our contemplation should rest when we are struck with the exhibitions of character, especially of our own ; we should learn to pass rapidly from these outer signs of inward and spiritual grace, or of inward and spiritual wickedness, to the living spring within, to the spirit dwelling at the centre and giving forth these manifestations of itself. Our actions pass away and are forgotten, the deeds of to-day are to-morrow with the years beyond the flood, but the spirit that prompted or permitted such acts remains and carries the traces of its own doings, every expression of purity and disinterested love making the nature it came from more pure and loving, every expression of vicious selfishness engraining the spirit with a more inveterate self-regard. It is this inward fact which gives its essential aggregate of awfulness to a life of frivolity or of low and debased desires. Dreadful as are the accumulations of distinct acts of evil, when you number them one by one, there is a reality behind that outward arithmetic more dreadful still. For all is not over when the deed and its visible consequences are past and gone. Its marks are on the

originating spirit, and *there* in the soul God ties together the causes and effects, which leave no deed without its living witness. The wasted hours may be long fled, the perpetrated guilt may have vanished from the face of creation, whose harmonies it insulted, whose temple it stained, the misspent life of heartless, mindless trifling may have been cut short by death, buried in a grave from which for *it* there is no resurrection, but the soul that puts itself into these attitudes outlives them, misshapen in the moulds of its own deeds—the aggregate of its own past—the result of each unworthy influence it received and gave. It is so, likewise, with all that is GOOD in character. The separate acts are not remembered, but the spirit that suggested and enforced them bears their impress, and of that which the poet calls “the best portion of a good man’s life, his little nameless, unremembered acts of kindness and of love,” there is not one which does not leave him a better and a happier being through all Eternity.

This seems a simple way of getting to a right apprehension of what is meant by *Character*, attributing the life and conduct to our prevailing moral disposition, to a suggesting spirit within, and so fixing attention upon that as to be enabled to transform and sway it. In this is a principle of education upon which all schemes of individual reformation must proceed. It is not enough to restrain and curb the outward actions, unless you do so with a desire of touching and moving the heart out of which are the unprompted issues of the life. It is not enough



to arrest the perversity of a child, though that may be necessary, unless you do so with a desire to sweeten and clear the fountain of feeling or understanding out of which the perversity arose. There is nothing remedial in interdicting by mere authority, in externally crushing the *expressions* of temper, while yet you do nothing to qualify, soften, or amend it. No spirit ever was regenerated by simply putting chains upon it and tying it up. I am speaking of how one spirit may influence another ; for in a man's dealings with himself it is the proper course for the better spirit that is in you to put chains upon the worse, simply to deny it its indulgence, and to bind it as its master, for then you are acting out of the good that is in you, which, however feeble it may be, whatever struggles you may have to maintain its ascendancy, you yet perceive to be the *highest* thing that is in you, and the rightful lord of all the rest. But as concerns effectual action upon *others*, the hidden life will not be essentially changed, however its activity may be restricted, so long as a dominant spirit is enthroned within, and rules in the very blood. It is vain to expect results of life for which the existing nature in a man provides neither an affection, a motive, nor a will. In education, whether of ourselves or of others, it is often right to exact tasks, but it is for the sake of producing tastes, inborn desires that will not be satisfied with less ; it is often right to insist on a certain measure of work, but it is for the sake of developing capabilities ; it is often right, though always dangerous, to look for

expressions, manifestations of feeling, but these are cared for only for the sake of unprompted gushings from the fountain heart. It is upon dispositions we must act, if we would have a holy nature in us, and build up a perfect man. It is manifestly ineffectual to speak of the worthlessness of pursuits and yet do nothing to awaken the love of something better—to take from our passions the materials or opportunities of their indulgence, and yet leave the passions themselves craving and unrectified, as you might tie up a famished beast within sight of its food. You cannot purify a heart by an exhausting process—you cannot even make it *empty* by any preaching or proving to it that all its affections are worthless, and ought to be dismissed. You can only make one desire yield to another. You can only expel an evil affection by the introduction of a new and holier affection with which it cannot co-exist. It is useless to be lopping the branches and filtering the running streams. Can you sweeten or dry up the fountain of the poisoned waters? Can you reach the roots of the noxious growth, or by better growths leave no room for it, and kill it out of the soil? The heart will not, and cannot, remain vacant; the affections will cling to their objects, however worthless you may declare them to be, rather than have no objects at all; and it is only by establishing affinities with what is pure and good, that evil is no more our good, and drops disregarded from our love. And only the Spirit of God is competent to this; it alone, in our Lord's words, coming to a man will convince him of

sin, of righteousness, and of judgment. Spirit and affection, the love of goodness and of God, are the nutritive powers of the universe. Law can do nothing but lay a restrictive hand, and say No ; and *this* it does effectively only at *their* instigation. Law, indeed, with imperfect beings, is for ever necessary. Wherever a man's spirit may not be freely trusted to produce of its own accord all the fruits of God's spirit in us, law must come in ; but even then what is it that moves the law—what is it that puts law into action ? Law is a dead thing, and cannot apply itself. It is spirit and affection, that sense and love of what is right which we call conscience and the monition of God, which impose the law, for the sake of their own preservation, of their own development ; and as men become *assured* in goodness, as they approach nearer and nearer to Him who is Spirit and Love only, law virtually withdraws from large departments of the affections and the will, and is *sensibly* felt only in those portions of our Christian walk in which we have not yet *attained*, on whose higher way some yet unconquered weakness resists our better will. Law and the necessity for law are in the exact measure of spiritual imperfection ; yet even then it is the witness to spiritual vitality, for laws do not execute themselves ; it is still spirit and affection, the sense and love of what is good, that bind the law upon their own weakness for the sake of the perfection that is the constitution, the beginning and the end of our being. A man *compels* himself to do good actions for the sake of that love which

he feels is not as full in its expression, as perfect as it ought to be; but then clearly law is not his master but his instrument—it is the love that is in him, however small it may be, his feeling of preference for what is good, that so actuates and constrains him. St. Paul said most truly, and it is the key to all his teaching: “The law is not made for a righteous man,” it is made for those in whom love is not yet perfect. Yet imperfect love may be strong enough to retain its right desire, and impose law upon itself, until it becomes spirit for ever going on unto perfection.

How wisely tender should this view of our nature make us in our treatment of the sins and maladies of men, more anxious, in Christ's words, to give a soul “life in itself,” to create or renew its sympathies with God and goodness by the natural power of spiritual attraction than to raise the tones of moral indignation and chastise it out of evil, fanning no spark of life. We should know, for the sake of our charity, to be preserved from breaking bruised reeds and quenching smoking flax, by what living powers character is changed, how a new life is impossible without a new spirit, and a new spirit is often impossible without a new education. When we look at the noblest exhibitions of our nature we should never despair of the most hopeless, for we know that, notwithstanding disturbances and malformations, it is fundamentally the same nature, the same in its laws and structure, the same in its conditions of stability and health. Indeed, the transforming power

that passes over character when the heart suddenly awakens to some of the purer joys and attachments of this world, is significant of the mightier power whereby the whole life is changed, when any clear light of spiritual truth penetrates its dimness, and its own essential nature, the power of soul, comes at last into open conflict with every usurped dominion. When we look into character, and attempt to judge of its fitness for God's future by the simple measure of its capacity to find its natural life in God's presence, in the midst of Heaven's pursuits and Heaven's purities, we see that some change must take place in all before we shall be qualified to have our blessedness in sources purely spiritual. But a nature that is designed for immortality has in its own structure the germs of all its destiny, the seeds of eternal life, needing only a willing sensibility in ourselves to the quickening culture of God; and while we rely on the Father and Keeper of Souls that no heart shall wander for ever from Him who is the end of all our being, we yet feel that He helps us effectually only when He has drawn *our* will into the service of His Spirit in us, so that *our* spirit, after the manner of His Son's, purposely waits on Him for guidance and for fulness of being, and our daily religion becomes more and more, to adopt the intense expression and the just conception of the old divines, as "the life of God in the soul of man." For we have not to supply ourselves with inspirations—we have for ever, like Christ, to wait on God for the renewal of His Spirit, and then if we do not "*quench the spirit*" by neglect and



disobedience, the way of eternal life is for ever open to us. Surely man's part and God's part in human salvation is clearly defined by St. Paul, "Work *out* your own salvation, for God Himself works in you what you are to will, and what you are to do." Our responsibility is for *this*—that we never resist what we know to be a prompting of good. Obey them, and you will never be without them. Begin at any moment to obey them, and they will multiply upon you. They will grow with your growth, and strengthen with your strength.

"The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance." If our hearts were right with God, if we took in all that we might take in of His Spirit, if, as our Lord said, we were at heart children of our Father who is in Heaven, these would be the frames of our soul and their manifestations in life. It is this right-mindedness that is our *last mark*, the very prize of our high calling. It is most true that right actions must be forced when we do not feel the impulses that lead to them; that we must insist with ourselves on the performance of duties, though we have no present inclination for them; but what is this but the spirit of life that is in us, though it be but a spark, recognizing its divine work, and proceeding in quest of more? How perfectly Christ's life revealed Christ's spirit, and was determined by it! His most extemporaneous action, his simplest word, shows something of his constant temper, gives an insight into his central being, this fountain of living water. The fulness of

his communion with God is perhaps most wonderfully shown in that quality which comes last in the Apostle's enumeration of the fruits of the Spirit, in the divine "*temperance*" of his being, in the freedom from all the excesses of religious excitement, from all violent disregard of this world, of one who was altogether spiritual, and, because he was spiritual, needed not to be partial or timid, discerning that in their place all the creatures of God are good. Yet our Lord was not without struggles of spirit—struggles with man: "How long shall I be with you and suffer you!" struggles with himself and with God: "Now is my soul troubled;" "Take this cup away!" He, too, had to cherish the life that was in him; but in every such moment of natural weakness we behold him taking his soul to God. Let any one examine for himself the express occasions in which it is mentioned in the Gospels that our Lord withdrew to pray.

Such a life was not, and could not be, a series of disjointed actions. It was the fruit of one spirit. Now the cultivation of that spirit is the one thing needful, the beginning and the end. To have the inward temper, informed by God, that will suggest our thoughts, and speak our words, and shape our deeds aright, the good treasure of the heart out of which only good things can come—towards this should be directed our desires, our efforts, and our prayers. It is a dreadful thought that our sins and evil passions, the most excusable of them all, are not blotches on the surface, but corrupt life within, bad blood at the heart, an evil spirit's prompting. You

know not what *spirit* you are of, said Christ to the two disciples inflamed by a persecuting zeal. There was awful force in that ancient idea of demoniacal possession ; for which of us can say that he is entirely free from an usurping, indwelling spirit of envy, or low jealousy, or impure desire, or guilty curiosity, or contradiction, or self-exaggeration, or quick resentment, or moody discontent that, tearing us, hardly departeth from us, to return again in fits when its hour is come ? And there is this advantage in thus looking directly at the evil spirit of our life, that if we are only in earnest in our purpose of reformation we can at any moment that we please cleanse the whole fountain of our being. We can, if we are so minded, realize the sense of God's presence and feel the elevation of His Spirit ; we can cast out every other spirit simply by making ourselves a temple for God through a solemn act of devout thought, for God and an evil purpose cannot dwell together in the same heart at the same time : "the temple of God is holy ; which temple ye are." And this we can repeat till no spirit rules in us but His. In this truly "God is our Refuge and Help." There is one prayer that includes all prayers : "Create in me a clean heart, O God : renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from *Thy presence* : and take not Thy holy spirit from me."

## XVIII.

### Religion and the Child.

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MATT. xix. 14 :

“ Suffer little children to come unto me : for of such is the kingdom of heaven.”

EPHES. vi. 4 :

“ Provoke not your children to wrath : but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.”

THE great object in education is to excite a mind to voluntary action, to create tastes that will protect themselves and ennoble the whole nature, to breathe through mind and heart such a love of knowledge, of truth and goodness, as will ensure perpetual progress through the strong hunger and thirst of the spiritual faculties.

Nothing is attained in education until a mind may with safety be entrusted to itself, its own desires urging it in directions of thought and study, its own affections in directions of sympathy and action. What a teacher should constantly aim at is, to make the minds he acts upon independent of himself, daily to render external help less necessary to them because their path is chosen, and the keys, the elementary

principles of knowledge and of life, are securely in their hands. It is not the *quantity* of knowledge communicated that tests a teacher's fitness; it is the intellectual love he has nurtured, the spiritual inclinations he has formed. They are the true teachers, in science or in religion, who enable us to go alone, who quicken the natural germs, who impart a vitality that thenceforwards is dependent only on opportunity and God.

This chief aim of education will open for us an insight into the right *methods* of instruction. The great art is to make willing captives, to lead even through laborious steps by the fascinations of pursuit; not to lessen the toil of thought, the rigour of attention, but to make it eagerly borne through interest and through ardour. It is but for a short period of life that knowledge or duty can be forced on any one. We quickly outgrow the youthful stages of restraint and fear; and if then there are no fountains in the mind itself, springing up into everlasting life, it takes its natural revenge by a strong recoil from hated tasks, and carries through after-years the bitter remembrance of an education without love—a distasteful, drudging discipline, in which the intellect was unwooed by truth, the heart untouched by sympathy.

Those who have had large experience of education, or who in individual instances have watched with strong interest the spring-time of thought, know with what an eagerness the young brain may burn, how happy and how beautiful the intense aspect of the occupied mind, how the whole outward



being changes when the spiritual essence, the lamp within, is lighted, when the soul begins to gaze and ponder, the heart to throb and glow. And if this is not always the case, it is more from a want of adaptation in the outward stimulants, than from a want of aptitude in the inward spirit. All minds have their key-notes, which must be struck before the peculiar capabilities of the instrument become known to itself or to others. The sluggish eye, and unilluminated features, which many an education fails to dispel, are more frequently proofs that the mind has not had its especial fitnesses ascertained, nor been approached by its favourable avenues, than that it has been created destitute of all powers, a barrenness from which no springs of life may be made to gush. Minds of this class, in which great capabilities may be often long latent, especially require, what indeed ought to be the kindly treatment of minds of every class, that the circumstances surrounding them should be genial and gentle; that Nature should be encouraged to reveal her own fitnesses, not crushed into arbitrary moulds, nor under forced subjection to intellectual demands to which constitutionally they are not equal, which Milton said was to draw blood as from the nostrils where there was none; and that more should be looked for from the quickening power of the life that is around them, the atmosphere of education in which they live, and move, and have their being, than from the direct efforts of instruction. To give knowledge, intellectual or religious, is one thing, but the formation of

character, to touch the soul, to unseal the fountain, is quite another ; and the most important part of the influences that mould us are often those which are not aimed at us. We are formed rather by the undesigned action of the life and thought that are brought very near us than by the express lessons that are attempted to be taught us. Even children are subdued, reverently moved, by a life of regularity, assiduity, laborious devotion to work, passed before their eyes. A noble example of this kind, daily and quietly exhibiting itself in its own walks, going through its own duties, not saying much about them, for that all minds will resent until they are perfect, but full of them, and full of the human interests they awaken, impressing its orderly beauty on the conscience and the heart, would be a richer education, more likely to impress a kindred character, than volumes of instruction on the theory of morals, or the minutest details of practical ethics consequentially demonstrated. Household influences are the first shapes and impresses of nature. God alone knows how it is that men and women colour the souls of their children, not so much by what they do or say, as by what they are, by the hidden essence of their characters, but it is certain that they do so. It is out of the things brought nearest to it—all the more impressive if they are fine, deep-seated, ingrained, and subtle,—that the soul weaves the web of its life. Nothing touches so powerfully as the familiar forms of life, thought, temper, duty, nature, and art, amid which existence passes. A mind that has spent its

youth in a home over which the hand of simple taste, with a tact that is often a secret to itself, has spread the forms of beauty, a taste which may be displayed upon the scantiest means, and a charm which may be given to the coarsest materials, will partake more certainly of that spirit which discerns the finer essence of God's world, and looks every natural scene into its supernatural meaning, than if without this early moulding of its real presence, it had sought it formally, with all appliances, in the famous schools of art. The cheerful faith of parents, erect and sustained amid the various providences of God, simply showing in whose strength they walk, on whom they rest their burdens, will do more to teach that religion is the great reality, and piety a living light in the soul, than all lectures and catechisms. Domestic truth, unswerving justice in daily life, adherence to the right amid the sore exigencies of temptation, anything borne, rather than God and Honour lost, do more than all religious instruction to make it felt that Conscience is the inviolable law, and Righteousness the priceless treasure. And the simple fact displayed to children, that others find sufficing delights in a mental life, in the pursuits of an intellectual and spiritual home where they are emancipated from the world, and do not require the diversion or excitements of costly pleasures, does more than all besides to teach effectually that it is really believed that a man's life consisteth not in *the things* that he possesses, that the intellect, the imagination, the heart, the soul, are our true riches, our wealth,

and our well-being ; that a spring of living thought is a better enlivener in a house, more fruitful of daily happiness, than all that gold can buy—that *the spirit* which God has put into every man, by the freshness of its movement, by the play of light, the ever-new charm it can impart to existence, by quest for truth, by enthusiasm for goodness, by sympathy with beauty, by enjoyment of God in nature, is the one real element of eternal blessedness.

These great truths pass the lips of society, and are floated on air into the mind of childhood—but the circumstances of our lives are not such as to give effect to the direct teachings. Our theories on these matters would hardly be gathered from our practices, and childhood does not insensibly drink the spirit of them from the experience amid which it dwells. They would not come to it naturally from what it sees of life. A love of intellectual things has to be excited by the place that is given to them among our wonted pleasures. A love of goodness is kindled by the sweetness of its living voice, by the nobleness, patience, or serenity of its living presence. A child is ever the most rigid exactor of consistency. It is worse than vain to speak to it of spiritual things that are not realities to yourself, unless you do so with confession and humility as of things that are lost to you, and that you are anxious to redeem so far as now you can. It never fails to detect a departure from the law that is prescribed to itself, or a practical unbelief in the truth that is taught it. It is led, such is the presence and power of God in the natural heirs

of His kingdom, lovingly along by the blessed sway of imitation and sympathy. It will not complain of hard work and a healthy life. It is plastic in the hands of those in whom its trust is perfect, towards whom it feels the sustaining power of reverence. It soon knows, secretly despises, and at last openly rebels against, those who do not deal truthfully with it, who reveal to its quick feeling of wrong their exactions and their insincerities, the difference between what they say and what they are. The *moral* power, the great force in education, has departed from such teachers. "Provoke not your children to wrath, but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord."

It is especially in the development of the religious sentiment and principle that the education of life and circumstance should be happily disposed, so as to give effect to the welcome thought of God and duty. No evil in this way could be greater than the early gloom which devotional subjects were once made to drop upon the spirit of childhood—the forced seriousness, the irksomeness, and the restraint. That all this is rapidly changing is some proof that religion, *now* more than ever, is felt to have a natural spring in man ; and that, because of this, we trust more to God and Nature that great interest which God and Nature bring so near to us. A severe system of religious discipline, strong demarcations between natural and spiritual life painfully enforced, always bespeak the consciousness of working against Nature, of not educating it, but forcibly shaping it. The Puritans



avowed this : Religion was not natural to man, but a graft upon him, as of a choice rose upon a wild-briar stock. The evil that was done with the purest intentions—the misery that was occasioned—the sufferings of a false conscience artificially created, darkening the heart with the imputation of sin where there was no sin, is written where none can read it. Thank God all this, though in some places still too strong, is passing from the earth—and passing not from indifference or unbelief, but through more of faith. For if anything should be guarded with especial care it is to prevent painful, terrible, unnatural, revolting associations with the spiritual world mingling in the fountains of infant thought. That world, with its infinite themes, its mysterious questions, its invisible God, so far removed from sensible apprehension, are so likely of themselves to oppress and awe the timid but active imagination of childhood, that all the influences of circumstance and of personal teaching should be directed to counteract *unspiritual* effects, to endear and familiarize such vast conceptions, to make a safe home in the pure affections, in the simple suggestions of conscience for thoughts so capable of false and fearful forms, that ought to dwell in the reverent heart of childhood peacefully, lovingly, invitingly, with gentle force and pressure expanding as the spiritual temple grows.

A large share of this early repulsiveness, robbing the after-life of its best peace, a trusting repose of the spirit upon God, the natural joy of the soul, must be attributed to the attempt either to teach religion

to a child in too complete, too systematic a form, to teach theoretic or abstract truths with which a child's understanding cannot deal, and attaches no meaning to the words, or ghosts or shadows of meaning that are never afterwards dislodged,—or to hurry it away from the warm life around it to the dim scenes of history with which its limited experience gives it few points of sympathy, and whose real character it cannot comprehend ; to supplant the living teachers of feeling, of observation, of natural piety, of gratitude for daily blessings, of the sense of God's present goodness, by the remote and shadowy past, to carry it back to the origin of things, to station the unfurnished observer in the Garden of Eden, to teach solemnly, with strange results of infantile misconception, the conjectural and mythical history of the antediluvian world, more solicitous that it should be instructed in the story and the supposed consequences of Adam's fall than that it should inwardly glow with a sense of God's love ; to make it embark with Noah, and sail down the stream of providence from the creation of the world. Is it not true that hitherto almost the only recognized way of teaching religion to a child was to make it an historian ? Hitherto, to bring a child naturally unto God we set it to learn supernatural history. To quicken its spiritual emotions our parents and teachers knew no better way than to send it to the pages and letters of a book, to reanimate past ages of existence that resembled nothing in its own experience, with not freshness enough in their own souls to dispel the profane

aspect from the real world and show the sacred light upon it, striving to resuscitate forms of life that never will return, and to connect a child's piety, its knowledge of God, with the spectres of an inadequate imagination, the tasks of a reluctant memory. I need not say that the history of revelation, which, when we are able to receive it, is the history of the Life of God in the soul of man, is the most essential part of what is called religious instruction, as distinguished from the personal religion which belongs to us as individuals. And as religious instruction must be connected with real facts of some kind, the public teaching of the Church cannot do better, even for children, than seek to unfold the connection of God with the whole course of past life and thought, to show how the sentiment of faith, the Divine instinct, has wrought and grown under all forms of human nature and in all conditions of society, until it became perfect in Him who knew *all* that is in man, and holds the key of every spirit. But we would deprecate this historical teaching as a child's first introduction to religion. The parent at least, if not the Church, or the school, has earlier, nearer, more personal work to do. A child's strongest interest is in the experiences of its own life, and there first should it be directed to look for God. Let it be taught to know God's loving kindness in His goodness to itself; that a benignant spirit lives in the universe; and seeing that still, day by day, He spreads the table and fills the cup, we may leave it to a later time to speak of the manna in the wilderness. Let its senses

be its first teachers of gratitude ; let it feel the sun, and listen to the streams, and watch the glad waters mysteriously moving on and on for ever in light and music, and pluck the flowers upon the banks, and exult in the sensation of life, the joy of mere existence, along with that strange mixture of imaginative musing which is ever childhood's spiritual dower ; and with all this exquisite happiness let thanks to the invisible Father be bound up in the fresh emotions of a child's first prayer. There is no difficulty in awakening the feeling of a child : the difficulty is not to deaden that feeling by our dry, unfeeling answers to its primitive questions. The time of simple feeling has so passed from ourselves, and a time of secondary thought so intervened, that we no longer know how to deal freshly and naturally with these opening buds of spiritual life. They are at the stage of pure feeling : we are at the stage of imperfect thinking ; and so far as spontaneous sensibility is concerned have unhappily left the first stage behind us—the kingdom of Heaven in the little child of Christ. Few of us are capable of religiously conversing with a child without getting *off* the child's ground of immediate feeling and fresh fact to the man's ground of general truth, or intellectual statement, or formal law, or dry history from which the individual life has vanished. Let there be no undue anxiety about the correctness of the ideas of God first formed, the feelings being fresh and right. Rather let them be the child's ideas than your ideas ; they will fit it better, and they will teach *you* more. They

must necessarily be imperfect, and any attempt to make them complete, to make a child *think* worthily of the Unsearchable, will only exaggerate the error. It is the personal bond with the living God that is alone of essential importance to any of us, and *that* may be made as clear to the child as to the man—more clear indeed to a child than it now is to a man, unless through all his days the child has been the father of the man. It is not as he sees Him in science or in law, nor as he reads of Him in history, nor even as he feels Him in Nature, but as he has personal relations to Him in his own consciousness that the child knows God. Conscience is the present God, the life and word of the invisible spirit. The omnipresence of God to a child's apprehension is nothing metaphysical, but entirely spiritual. It simply means that in the instinct and sentiment of duty, which goes with it everywhere, and yet is mysteriously above it, He has beset it behind and before, and laid His hand upon it. Where shall it go from that Spirit? Where shall it flee from that Presence? *There* is the true and living communion with God through which, if he has not lost it himself, every parent may speak to the spiritual nature of his child. God it may not see in the external universe; God it may not discern in history; but God it will not fail to find in the inexplicable Witness. That law within itself which yet is not itself, which is forcibly proclaimed from time to time by an indwelling authority, which awes it and commands it, and which it cannot silence—by that way may the child



be led into the presence of the living God, and by the reverence it pays to His voice become a willing worshipper in spirit and in truth. It is in this way that all through life the noblest and the most devotional form of character is maintained, that the saint and the martyr is made, that we are changed into the same image from glory to glory, by identifying suggestions and beckonings of conscience with the voice and the finger of God.

It is remarkable, and it is not altogether satisfactory, how much of that figurative language by which we strive to bring God near to us, and which with those who first used it originated in His felt nearness to them, is derived not from anything in our own experience of life, but from a quite foreign life that only sacred literature has imprinted upon us. "God is our Shepherd, and we are the sheep of His pasture." "We sit under our own vine and our own fig-tree, with none to make us afraid." We have no more modern, no more personal way of saying these things in figurative words fresh from our own life. We would not lose these expressions on any account, we are in every way richer for possessing them—and though we are not a pastoral people, and do not dwell in a land flowing with milk and honey, with wine and oil, these forms of existence are so simple, so easily conceived, that the language is readily adopted and is still instinct with life. But, why is not our own living experience more creative of spiritual language of this sort? Why do not *we*, like Christ, speak parables of Nature and spiritual fellowship from the

commonest things around *us*, and find them not mean or vulgar but fresh as with the morning dews of Heaven? Is it not that with us the profane aspect of our common life is too strong, and its sacred aspect too weak, too uncertain, to permit us with safety to borrow our spiritual language from our ordinary callings? For example, if the Hebrews had been a commercial and sea-going people, if they had had experience of anything but an inland traffic or an inland sea, unquestionably they would have spoken of God as their Pilot as well as their Shepherd. We dare not do so: yet the image brings us nearer to infinite, mysterious, and heavenly guidance. Of course we cannot attempt to force figurative language from familiar sources; if it does not come naturally it is worth nothing: but it shows the difference between an age when the commonest forms of life were full of God, and an age like this, when we have to *retire* within ourselves even from callings that readily ally themselves with divine similitudes, to feel Him near us: and it is very much the difference between a spiritual child and an unspiritual man.

Another of the preposterous methods of religious education, that might well provoke to not unrighteous wrath in later years if the mind ever awakes to the tyranny practised upon it, is the habit of teaching *as revealed truths* perplexing and doubtful doctrines before the spirit is "able to bear" such subjects, or can arrive at any real possession of them, or is sufficiently alive to its own interests to resist encroachment on its future rights. A religious teacher thinks it a righteous

thing to crush in the seed the natural force of evidence, and by arbitrary will to incapacitate a mind from ever attaining an unbiased view of the great questions that divide the deepest religious thinkers. I know not that a more serious wrong could be inflicted, that the idea of justice could be more gravely violated, than to take a mind incompetent and helpless, and by an act of usurpation make it a copy of ourselves—by pre-occupying it with our opinions, when it can have none of its own—to provide against the time when it might think impartially and with adequate knowledge, that it shall think in no other way than as we determine. An instructed conscience would as soon think of robbing a child of its birthright, of destroying its future freedom of action in the things that belong to the world, as its future freedom of thought in the things that belong to God.

In what sense, then, is Religion the foundation of all education—for there must be a sense in which this can be maintained without betraying the independence of the individual spirit or the ever-fresh interests of progressive truth. It is true of Religion: it is not true of Theology. In the hands of bigots this is a formidable premise: Religion is at the root of all education; for since to them all the power of true Religion is in *their Theology*, the inference is clear, that it is a duty to lose no time in occupying the mind of childhood with their own creeds. It is the religious sentiment, all that is of the nature of personal communion with God, and of spiritual experience, that ought to be at the foundation of

education, not "*doubtful disputations.*" It is true of everything in Religion that conscience, and affection, and the Spirit of God attest; it is not true of that supposed truth which depends on philosophical speculation or inferential interpretations to which a child is not adequate,—on evidence, and a faculty of weighing evidence, with neither of which a child is furnished. No religious truth that a parent receives himself on *spiritual* Evidence need he be restrained from imparting to his child. For example, he may teach the unity of God, for *all* spiritual minds receive it: but he may not teach a metaphysical plurality in that unity, for, even if true, it rests not on spiritual grounds, but on external or argumentative proofs quite beyond a child's province. He may teach the inexhaustible goodness and forgivingness of God—but no *scheme* of salvation, beyond the simplicity of the parable of the Prodigal Son: "I will arise and go to my father." "This my son was dead, and is alive again: he was lost, and is found." He may bring up his child, as in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, in regard to all convictions of his own for which he can make God his direct spiritual Witness.

And this usurping system of religious education is only a fragment of a very general want of faith *in Truth*. Men do evil in the hope that good may come of it. They do not confide in the light, and endeavour by foreign means to influence the result. Strange to say, it was the party that believed in the verbal inspiration of the Scriptures that was opposed

to a revised Bible, to a true text, and a true translation. They were afraid that what they held as all-important truth might lose some accidental, yet unfair, advantage which then it had. This is the teaching that makes sceptics, indifferentists, bigots: crushing all genuine faith. This distrust of truth—this manœuvring for righteousness' sake—acting falsely for God, is the most dangerous form of infidelity. Again and again does that profound question of the Master fall upon our hearts, "When the Son of Man cometh will he find *faith* upon the earth?" Let us live in faith: work in faith: teach in faith: sow good seed far and wide in faith: cast our bread upon the waters in faith—and when we are dead and gone, if God gives His Blessing—it will bear good fruit, and feed the coming ages!



## XIX.

### Casual Diversions of Spirit, and the Ever-present Comforter.

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I SAMUEL xvi. 23 :

“When the evil spirit from God was upon Saul, David took a harp, and played with his hand ; so Saul was refreshed, and was well, and the evil spirit departed from him.”

EVERY one must have observed, with encouragement or with humiliation as he was affected for better or for worse, how most serious changes in modes of temper, in frames of mind, in attitudes of soul, in the practical disposal of time, are produced by very slight changes in the influences that are acting upon us. Character and conduct would seem not moved and sustained by the strength of an inner spring of sentiment and will, constant in direction, uniform in power, but rather to be driven and drifted by the circumstances brought to bear upon us—sometimes raising us to Heaven as the native atmosphere of pure and loving hearts untroubled by ambitions, sometimes letting us fall dejected to the earth, our props all broken, and the buoyancy of our spirit gone.

Under one set of influences, it may be with one

set of companions, we walk according to the spirit, from our deepest convictions and our highest feelings, looking into the heart of things with open face as though nothing again could distort or cloud the realities that concern our eternal peace: under another set of influences, or with other associates, we walk according to the flesh, take the colour of the time, have no character independent of casualty, and leave our nature to be a debtor for its states to the accidents of evil or of good.

Yet, to extract such consolation as we may under the different spiritual aspects of the same man at different times,—we are inconsistent without being purposely, or consciously, insincere. In seasons of thought, in solitude, in prayer, apart with Christ on some mount of meditation, or under awe of the *unspoken* Word, we may feel the glow of devotion on our erect and awakened nature, the soul to be the enduring reality, God to be in all things and all things in God—and how elated we can become you all remember, how impossible we deem it that the sublimity and awe should utterly pass from our souls, that we should ever sink again to the littleness of irritable tempers and miserable cares, the helpless victims of a wayward moment,—and yet how slight a thing may avail to change the currents of our being—how trifling the discomfiture that can insinuate its vexation and edge away from the Heart that sacred peace, reducing us once more under a dominion that is unworthy of us—and because of the elevation we have fallen from, leaving us more remorseful and

unhappy, perhaps weaker in the reaction of our self-distrust, than if we had never been so lifted up !

In the times of our spiritual-mindedness, in the clearer moments of our faith, we can look all facts and their issues in the face, and, while yet the fire burns, feel every yoke to be easy, every burden to be light, and even temptation and sacrifice as only the high incitements of God, the animating tests of power, the distinguished stations on the race where the victor earns his crown : yet who needs to be told that all this can pass away, and leave not a vestige of its sacredness or its confidence behind, that the descent of a soul can be rapid and utter, that he who under one set of influences was dreaming of doing the will of God as the angels do it, walking as on ether, treading in thought the mountain tops of life, may under another set of influences, and ere an hour passes, put forth the sad and mortifying exhibitions of peevish and selfish and mere ordinary humanity ?

In any moment of real communion with Christ, in any earnest application to the fountain of all serenity of spirit, under the power of human sympathy when that sympathy is of the purest quality and on the highest things, or even in states of less spiritual activity, in the home-confidences of the heart, the natural movements of affections habitually trustful, we may triumph without even the consciousness of struggle over such afflictions as are only circumstantial, —bring our stronger sorrows under the express gaze of Faith, and know that they are blessings in the making, and yet if but one step of that inward eleva-

tion be abandoned, if but the lightest cloud of unworthy care, of mean, ungenial passion trouble our quiet and veil our trust, if for a moment we forget everything but the vexations that are around our feet, in that moment we have fallen from the heights that commanded heaven, to struggle as we can through the tangled undergrowth of life.

And it is not in our spiritual frames only that this unstable equilibrium prevails ; the social aspects of the *natural* man are just as liable to fall under unworthy servitude to circumstance. Under an impulse of benevolence, a fresh gale of love, we may be hurried into the commission of a generous deed,—softened by the presence of distress, with its wretchedness before our eyes and its plaint in our hearts, we may seek to relieve the strong anguish which the sight of suffering creates, vanquished by compassion,—and yet, when the casually excited emotion that had surprised us into free goodness has subsided, when the sad tones that reached and tortured our sensibilities obtrude no more their beseeching melancholy, we can forget that there is misery in the world, and with a soul at ease shut out every troublesome application, and never dream that we are selfish though we know that there is destitution in the next street, and that we have cut ourselves off from the unsought sufferings of our kind.

Or, under the influence of companionship, we may feel a sudden warmth at the fountains whence are the issues of life, reserves and cold distrusts be swept away and the floodgates of the heart unlocked by the power of brotherhood, and in that hour of overflowing

cordiality the littleness of personal interests are forgotten in the transcendent delight of generous emotion, in the loving rivalries of friendship : and these pledged brothers of to-day may meet to-morrow on another stage where insensibly other motives come into natural play, where the heart grows as cautious and self as dominant as ever, and the old breath from the gale of worldliness introduces another class of associations, turn into the accustomed channels the currents of desire and all that was generous in profession, all that was sincere though fleeting in feeling is borne down by a dead pressure which has come to be regarded as the settled order of life, and all that would disturb it as but the foolishness of a passing excitement.

Everywhere do we find illustrations full of personal application, showing the dominance of superficial influence, when by outward circumstances we are soothed into tranquillity or vexed into irritations, melted in charity or contracted into self-seeking, breathe of holiness or wear the shade of impure thought, walk in faith within the felt guardianship of God, or, amid unspiritual interests and alien imaginations turn ourselves away from the light of His Countenance.

And these facts point to a principle that lies at the root of all self-culture, of all voluntary discipline, of all formation of character, so far as that formation depends on influences which lie within our own command. We have seasons of elevation, we have times of holier and better thought, we have frames of feel-



ing and of action which would indeed be blessed if only they were permanent; we know these, we know the influences that produce them; whither we go we know, and the way we know: we have also our tendencies to sink, to merge the spiritual in the host of meaner things that assail us, and it rests largely with ourselves to determine the prevailing presence under which we will live, what powers we choose to keep around us, what spirits we will have to enter in and make their abode in the chambers of our hearts.

The king of Israel could charm away the gloomy irritations of a disturbed, disordered mind by the dominant power of a natural influence. Saul was the victim of a moody nature, and in the fierce trouble of ungoverned passion the sweetness of music could win him to a happier frame. The heart of the undisciplined man could not attune itself, but when David took the harp and played with his hand, the mystic ministry of sounds put forth its healing, penetrative voice, touched the latent springs of gentle emotions, of healthy life, and the evil spirit departed from him, displaced by a holier presence. That was not self-control: it was a mechanical way of producing a calm of the passions. It was a *diversion* in favour of reason and of purity wrought by an extraneous hand. The soothing influence fell like breathings from Heaven on the strife within, and so long as the music floated over the entranced sense it beguiled the listening spirit from its ungentle retreats, "took the prisoned soul and lapped it in Elysium;" but when the magic spell was removed, the dark, bad temper, left again

to its own workings, distilled anew the black drops of bitterness, not again to know rest until the outward charm again infused gentler thoughts and freed the slaved and *tyrannous* heart from servitude to itself. That is not the way for a man to be governed : it is the way for a demon, a demoniacal temper, to be exorcised.

What *we* want is some power similar in its effects to that harp of solemn sound, in that it will always give us our saving emotions, our loving heart, our reasonable will, our healthy life, but *spiritual* in its nature, independent of accident, to be found of all that seek it, waiting upon no circumstance, resting between us and God alone. We want a presence that can both charm and nerve, sweeten and strengthen, heal our wounds and give us fresh armour. We want a living and present power from whose action we are never excluded, from whom nothing but health can come, and from before whose face, if we will meet His face, every evil spirit must pass away. No expedient, whatever be the rare faculties God has bestowed upon it, whatever eloquent music it can discourse, will supply that power. Ruffled emotions, perverted hearts, may be lulled and led by potent sounds, but the dark, unhappy nature is only entertained, not changed, and the suppressed passion swells back to the bosom when the enchantment dies. External influences we must indeed use, they are for our help or for our discipline, for our joy or for our strengthening, nor can it be denied that they may have a legitimate right to do anything with us that

is in their power to do, except to make us *in spirit* their dependents, except to let it rest *with them* to determine what the temper of our hearts, the fashion of our souls shall be, whether we are to be reasonable or unreasonable, loving or selfish, calm or passionate, devotional or worldly. Doubtless God has given to outward things, and to other minds, a great power over us. That power should be well understood. It is God's own ministry to us in Nature and in humanity. The scenes and the circumstances that are full of natural religion, that touch the instincts of faith, amid which we find that there is an aptitude in us to think of God, and be devotionally moved, should be dear and familiar, influences so known and sanctified by use that whenever we resort to them former associations return, and with ever-cumulative power make the place a temple and our soul a worshipper. The intercourse with men that touch some of the springs of unselfish feeling,—the power of simple kindness, the interchange of thoughts that lie below the surface of life and belong to the interpreting spirit; the free grace of God on some happy natures that in their exemption from doubt and sin seem to keep the blessing of their birthright and to live as they were born, members of the kingdom of Heaven; the loftier strain of others with heavier burdens through thick darkness upwards to the light; the simple, hearty, brotherly, sympathy in all the ills that flesh is heir to, which awakens effort, charity, and the blessed sense of usefulness,—*all this* winning or pathetic music of humanity every heart must

desire to hear that desires to meet God in His natural ways, to have its affections fresh and right, ready to be enlisted in every work of need. And *every* man may have a rich share in this most costly knowledge, a knowledge of the influences that awaken the soul, while they put to sleep the passions and the world. Every one knows some situations in which his spirit grows thoughtful and solemn—some influences under which he feels that the cloud melts out of his heart, and he becomes gentle and guileless as a child ; some scenes, some persons, whose power over his emotions is beneficent, delicious, and constant ; where unkindness could not dwell with him, where the world loses its worldliness and keeps only its healing breath and its holy mysteries—some associations with generous impulses, with holy incitements, with awakening and entrancing truths which we can call up when we will, and fill our hearts with their beauty and restorative power. For all this, the food and the medicine of the soul, through the power and grace of natural affections, God has made some provision for every child born into the world.

Yet, true as all this is, there are times when the rivers and the streams will fail us, and there is no draught to be had but at the fountain head ; and at *all* times the rivers and the streams seem to be deserting us, and lose their healing virtue, if we know not whence they flow. He that is devotional only when God is speaking to him through the glory of His visible works will often be worldly. He that is good only from the attraction of kindred goodness

with its voice wooing and its eye kindling on him, will often be miserably selfish. He that knows his right relation to the world's need and misery only when its wretchedness is before his eyes, and its anguished cry in his ears, will often be deeply guilty. The influence that is to keep us ever dutiful, ever thoughtful, ever quiet at heart, possessors of our own souls when our souls are most themselves, must have its abode within the soul itself. Doubtless we are creatures of influence, though we are not the creatures of circumstance ; for the one influence that is omnipotent over all circumstance is from the centre of our being, the influence of the Father of spirits. God, and God alone, can speak to every tone and to every want of the Heart, and make His voice sweet or awful, healing or searching, according to our need. In whatever strait we are, if we wait upon Him, and listen for the still, small voice, it will speak His truth—the truth, the reality, that will make us free. We need a Power ever present, ever truthful, never sparing us, yet for ever compassionate ; and we find Him in the Lord of our conscience, in the Holy Spirit of our souls. What syren need prevail with us against the music of our own Faith, and Hope, and Love—what evil spirit against the inspiration of our God ? It hangs on no man's breath—it comes not from the fair face of Nature ; these may be absent yet it will be present. The Power in whom we live is not foreign, but very nigh to us ; “ the word is even in our hearts, that we may hear it and do it.” What can compare with this, or contend against it on equal ground ? We



make not light of circumstance, but what is circumstance against God—what persuasion ought to prevail against our own faith—what voice against our own conscience? Assign to temptation all the terrible power it has ; and to your own weakness the worst that is natural to it ; and if you assign to either anything less than this they will surely prevail against you ; but still the mightiest thing that is in us, the mightiest power that can touch us, is our Faith, our Truth, our God, whom to deny is to deny ourselves—whom if you will hear, every storm will be a calm, or as the distant music of many waters ; every trial a divine invitation to take one step nearer to the Heavenly Throne.

When we speak of *internal* influences, of the Spirit of God as of right supreme, we are not forgetting, or undervaluing, that *external* ministry which each of us may both exert on, and receive from, our fellow-beings. Indeed, the influence within us is not likely to be healing or holy, if the influence that goes out from us is carelessly regarded. If we will not be as a harp to sweeten others, it can only prove that we need a harp for ourselves. I do not say that this ministry of personal influence is an office for men to aim at ; hardly could they do so without some injury to modesty and to natural grace. Nor is any one less likely to succeed in the blessed work of toning and elevating the hearts of men than one who could convince himself that he had a special gift of that kind, that to him in some high spiritual sense had been confided David's harp for the purpose of charm-

ing the disordered spirits of the world. The first condition of a real gift of influence is that God work through us by silent grace, and that the human instrument be not too conscious of the power it is exerting. Men will receive as from God through another's soul an influence that will lose its divine character if the man is seen purposely to aim it. If we have life in ourselves, enough and to spare, it will break from us, the more unconsciously the better, in simple thoughts that show a pure Heart, an uncorrupted nature—in graces that are seen and felt by others, though they know not themselves—in spontaneous love fulfilling the law—in oil on troubled waters, the meekness that turns away wrath; the large charity that is not easily provoked, and thinketh no evil—in the natural witness we give to truth and goodness for their sakes, not for ours, nor for a purpose.

A man full of grace and truth will act and speak graciously and truly, and God will use him accordingly; but if he occupies himself with thinking of his own influence he will act hurtfully on its natural springs, and turn the divine music of his being into mimic and offensive tones. There is but one rule for the man who would sweeten and purify the lives of others, for ever in God to sweeten and purify himself, to come freely into all natural relations with man, to neglect no fellowship that opens to him, not as one graced and gifted for *their* good, but simply, as under constraint of Christ, out of his impulse and his love. Let a man be good, and true, and pure, and loving

in word and in work, and he need not think about his influence—only let him beware lest he spoil himself by any insincerity, by any want of reality, for being an unconscious instrument in God's Hand.

But though the grace of our influence is with God, there is no limit to the measure in which we may qualify ourselves for being so used by Him ; no limit, that is, to the measure in which we may permit God to be an energizing influence on ourselves. What evil thought could live in His presence? What despair could look into His face and survive? To sanctify the soul we have but to invite God into it. The heart *is* holy if He is there. God permits us to use without stint or limit His own Goodness, the image of His goodness in our nature, for the saving and cleansing of our spirits. The use of the crucifix may become a superstition ; but who could fill his soul with Christ crucified and not for the time dispel guilty passion from his inmost being? All that most concern us are near us—within our reach, within our prayers ; if we invite them they will come and make their abode with us. All the powers of the world to come are within our own souls. The pleading angel that is in *us*, as in the little ones of Christ, can look ever into the face of our Father who is in Heaven. There is no life anywhere, here or in Heaven—the life of our dead who are now the living for evermore—which may not be used to attune the hearts of us men still walking on this earth. It is this that makes all our sin to be without excuse ; for *within us*, when we turn to Him, is the Power that can subdue it—the God

who will be present when we invite Him, and who cannot dwell *with* it in the same Heart.

It is this that makes all sorrow without hope as a wilful turning-away of our eyes from the Hills whence cometh our help ; for Heaven is open, and the Comforter abideth for ever.

“Why art thou cast down, oh my soul ? and why art thou disquieted within me ? Hope thou in God : for I shall yet praise Him, who is the Health of my countenance, and my God.”

## XX.

### The Resurrection World.

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I COR. xv. 41, 42 :

“One star differeth from another star in glory : so also is the resurrection of the dead.”

THE prevailing language about the future life which gives the main prominence to the place to which we go has naturally led to that classification of the world of spirits which distributes all departed souls into two divisions, and assigns the one to a region of absolute joy, the other to a region of unqualified woe. If there is a place wherein the spirits of men gone from this life are for ever in bliss emparadised, and another place wherein they are for ever in pain incarcerated, then all spiritual distinctions and discriminations in the future are reduced to nothing when compared with the single consideration of admission into the one, of escape from the other. The whole question of judgment and the eternal award will present itself under the form of two localities.

It is in their conceptions of *the invisible*, where they cease to be held in check by the great realities of God



around them, that men have displayed most of a fanatical and also of a carnal and unspiritual extravagance ; shaping that mystic world after *material* patterns at once easy and symmetrical, instead of looking into the soul, and the Divine arrangements in the actual life we know, for their ideas of the true, the good, the blessed, the real, the eternal, in the unknown future. They are misled, too, by a narrow fondness for system. All unspiritual minds would have God to act upon a rule, and a rule so precise that they themselves can lay it down and systematically apply it, forgetting that in their scheme of the Future, which they do not know, they are violating all the analogies of God's Providence in the present, which they might know. It is the spirit of theory, under the vulgar impression that authority is at its highest when it is least qualified and cuts the sharpest lines, which chooses to determine that in a futurity wherein God *reigns* and Man is *judged* there must be a place where He is in the fulness of beatific presence, and another place from which He absolutely withdraws—a place free from every mixture of solicitude, where no guilt excites a spiritual care, no grief a pang of sympathy, and another place unredeemed from its evil uniformity by any meltings of penitence, any opening lights of grace or goodness. *Here*, on earth, the dutiful mingle with the sinful, the blessed in spirit with the disobedient and unquiet of heart. *Here*, on earth, they are members of the same society, of the same family and household ; and their absolute separation would be destruction to all the highest

purposes of God's Providence in their spiritual education. If *Christ* lived, and chose to live, with publicans and with sinners, that he might seek and find the lost, and qualify *their* life by his own, it is strange that *Christians* should be so quick to conclude that the kingdom of Heaven must be constituted on directly opposite principles. But men whose notions of perfection are not spiritual, but mechanical, shaped upon a model of uniformity, forget all this; forget what God deems good and holy in the only world they know, and on the theory that all futurity is Judgment, and Judgment ONLY, they make a symmetrical Heaven and a symmetrical Hell, each absolute of its kind, and imagine that they have magnified the consistency of God by these boundary lines—that they have vindicated the spirituality of His Government by a local separation of the two elements in man—conceiving for Almighty Love and for Infinite Wisdom no higher aim, no holier result, than to abandon the conquest over evil in the hearts of those whom yet they call His children, as beyond His Will or beyond His Power,—and according to a preponderance of either in the moment of Death to detach the good element for eternal felicity, the evil element for endless suffering.

That Christ should have lived and taught, and declared God's Will for man, and spoken the Parable of the Prodigal Son to set forth the Father's relations to the most sinful of His children, and yet that men, thinking to exalt God, should believe that this everlasting defeat of God is the predicted consummation

of all things, is surely as marvellous as anything that could be named—the extreme instance of what is narrowest in man, his spirit of judgment, making itself the measure of what is highest in God, His Spirit of Grace and Power. Does this scheme of an absolute separation between the good and the evil elements in human wills bear any resemblance to the Providence of God on earth? We may be assured that it will bear just as little to the Providence of God in Heaven. The evil will never be separated from the good until evil itself is overcome by goodness and melts into its life; and instead of an everlasting uniformity of blessedness and of woe every passing hour of eternity must, there as here, make innumerable changes as new rays of truth and light fall upon the infinite complexity of souls. How widely different from the merely territorial view of the eternal world of spirits is the figurative descriptiveness of St. Paul: “One star differeth from another star in glory: so also is the resurrection of the dead.” Here is introduced a picture of spiritual variety as unlimited as imagery can convey; indeed, as it had to be to meet the case, too unlimited to be distinct. “There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars.” From the sun, who to us walks the heavens alone—not that he is alone, but because the myriads of lesser lights are lost in his beams, down to the smallest or most distant star visible only in thickest darkness—are the materials to be gathered that go to make up this vast image of spiritual co-existence; and, as the conceivable symbol of a Divine

fact, it sets forth the reasonable truth that all the varying hues of essential spiritual character shall be met by as many fitnesses of natural retribution; that as star differeth from star in glory, so the dwellers in Heaven shall take their place according to the brightness of their souls, and receive their measure of the divine enjoyment of God according as they are able to bear it. Whatever is spiritually true in the present remains true for ever. All laws of the soul are the same for heaven and for earth. "What is bound on earth shall be bound in heaven: what is loosed on earth shall be loosed in heaven." Nothing that is right here can be wrong there; nothing that is wrong here can be right there; no mingling of unlike souls that is according to God's holy will here can be unholy in Heaven. Heaven and earth shall sooner pass away than one tittle of the Spirit's law shall fail to be accomplished. Now, what is *the Spirit's* law as to the intercourse of the righteous with the unrighteous, of the blessed with the yet unblessed? Certainly Christ has left this in no doubt, so far as his authority and his practice can determine it. It is the one element of spiritual identity, of spiritual analogy and law, which, amid whatever inconceivable changes of circumstance, will harmonize earth and Heaven in the successive processes of one educational purpose. This affords our only means of discernment into the Future. Let us apply a moral rule to souls on earth; and if it would manifestly be evil or impossible there, then it must be evil or impossible, not there only, but wherever human souls are found. Who, then, in

reference to the human souls at any time congregated on this earth, even if he had a judgment true as God's, would think it possible to run between them a line of separation which should divide them into two classes of merit, each individual clearly belonging to his class and the classes marked by impassable distinctions? And if in reference to earth this is morally incredible, what is there that can make it just and right in Heaven? But what is Heaven? What lax imaginations have gathered around that high word and corrupted its purity, that whenever it occurs it is almost certain to usher in some luxurious fallacy, some carnal vision, some image of the senses? Is not the definition of Christ altogether forgotten or altogether misunderstood: "Neither, lo here! nor, lo there! for behold, the Kingdom of Heaven is within you"? That life in Heaven may be fitted to communicate the most exquisite delights, who can doubt that has ever known communion with Nature or felt God's power to address the soul through the Spirit that lives in, and looks into us out of, His works? But however this may be, these are not the essentials of Heaven. Many good men here on earth know little of this power, and make little account of it; and the purest blessedness, whether drawn from this or from any other source, will owe more to the inward soul than to the outward circumstance. There may be all of external glory by which God can worthily be revealed, there may be sounds that we name, but do not know, as the music of the spheres; there may be an ethereal atmosphere through which God is glassed,



as in open vision ; there may be more of this, and such as this, than it hath entered into the heart of man to conceive, yet are we assured that none of these, nor all of them together, make the spiritual Heaven of Christ, the Heaven of our personal fellowship with God—that the essential delights of that Heaven, without which these, if we could realize them in a world of judgment, would only expose us to torturing shame, are righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. Even as on earth, so in Heaven, it is within that we must look for the properties that can make an elysium out of external things,—it is by the powers of the inward life that we walk now on God's world with a kindling eye and a drinking spirit ; from the calm of a conscience not satisfied indeed, but desiring to be true and just before God, and from the thirst for full communion are gathered now the spiritual elements of boundless trust and peace, and if these inward qualities had no germ in us, there could be no Heaven for us ; in the presence of God and of the Holy Angels and of the spirits of the just made perfect we should feel ourselves to be outcasts, and the new Heavens and the new Earth wherein dwelleth righteousness be our most ungenial abode, a mocking exile.

If the Angel of Death, on the warning of a moment, were to summon any one amongst us to the reckonings of a commenced Eternity—the habits of holiness that are now formed within us, the spiritual relations that we have now established with our God, the currents of pure and elevated thought that are now working

channels in our hearts, the practical amount of our present sympathies with the love and self-sacrifice of the perfect Son of Man—these would make the elements of our initial Heaven; and to reverse the picture, our ingratitude, our disobedience, our insensibility, our deadened affections, the estrangement between the soul and its God, the distance we have wandered from our Father's House, the perverseness that has resisted all His entreaties to return—these, with whatever deeper committed sins may cleave to us, would provide its food for the worm, its fuel for the fire.

If only our hearts were pure, and set on God in simple trust, what strength and spiritual patience might wait upon the thought that the future, essentially considered, must be a development of the Divine germs that are in the present, that nothing is lost, that nothing has irrecoverably gone from us, that nothing is unavenged or unrewarded, that all the seeds of life we have kept in our hearts shall remain with us to render in full measures the blessedness they enfold! For the moment of death can make no spiritual change in the soul: only, all that intercepts judgment is then removed, and we stand face to face with retribution. "After death the judgment." It is the crisis in the spirit's history: the reality, the full truth as to what we are, and what we deserve, can no longer be evaded or ignored. We shall then begin to know, even as we are known. The infinite variety of human character must all appear again, with nothing intrinsically altered, unless it be in the lost power of

hiding from ourselves. God will not destroy our present characters, and recreate them in an instant in some other form. He will carry us forward from what we now are. Otherwise this world would be a needless waste of experience, discipline, and suffering,—and judgment and retribution have no reality. Doubtless all issues of life are as acts of Divine Justice, and we ourselves are at this moment God's judgment upon our own past; but now we do not know ourselves, and cannot read the sentence. Besides, this world is not *purely* retributive: for if it was, it could not be disciplinary; we should have no trials of love, or faith, or patience. Death ushers us to our first experience of a life which, whatever else it may be, is retributive; and as we close our eyes on earth, do we appear at once in Heaven. Every form, and degree, and complexion of Goodness shall be there—from the steadfast soul that leans on God and “walks with inward glory crowned,” to the willing spirit that leaves itself at the mercy of the weak flesh, and slips at a sudden temptation; and every form of Evil shall be there—from the yet timid guilt where conscience still palsies the trembling hand and beating heart, to the desperate hardihood of the sin that knows nor fear nor hope. The soul shall appear as it is, prepared or unprepared, clothed or naked: the saint, just released from the strain of discipline, with the light of faith yet streaming on his face, and the set of the Heavenly Purpose on every feature; the sinner, with the marks of his standing fresh upon him; the seeker of pleasure, and the seeker of self, opening

his eyes for the first time as dimly conscious of a lost way; the trifier in his levity; the liar, "pale with falsehood;" the prodigal and the drunkard, with the look that tells the awful story of how he had renounced his Father's House and his Father's Spirit, and lived on husks, and had not yet "come to himself;" the murderer, with the blood-stains on his soul. Then, not by an outward judgment, but by a spiritual fitness, the one take their place among those who draw their life from God; the other, "blinded by excess of light," without a condemning sentence, must feel their outer darkness.

Are these first adjustments to be the fixing of our unchangeable destinies? Is earth to man the whole of Divine Teaching, and all the future nothing but an irreversible sentence? Is the unending life to be all execution of judgment upon a few dim, mistaken days, and the hand-breadth of present time to be the whole of opportunity for man? Who can believe it? Who can *really* think of Eternity, and couple it with such a thought? Who can *really* think on man's nature, on God's Love, on God's Righteousness, and credit such an infinite contradiction? If this were so, then, indeed, let us desire to remain where we are, and contend against Death, and fear it as our worst foe; for this world would be more spiritual than the world to which we go: here, at least, there is a place of repentance for the worst, as well as of improvement for the best, and Death would come only to cut off progress.

I believe that only a single cause has kept Chris-

tendom from doubting the successive developments of our spiritual nature through discipline and education in the Eternal Life: and that is, because it is supposed that the Bible, as an oracle of belief, including all it is taken to affirm, excluding all else, does not contain an explicit statement of this truth in so many words. It is amazing how verbal men expect God to be in His communications to them, when they look upon the Bible, not as a record of the impressions He has made on holy souls, but as His own Word, and *the whole* of His own Word, to man. They will not know what it is to be spiritually taught; they will not know that the real Word of God is that which is spoken to the soul, not that which is written in a book, and that all Scripture—and beyond Scripture, God's living Word in His Son—only help us so far as they enable us to understand God speaking within ourselves. There are those who will believe nothing that they do not find in the words of their Bibles; who believing that Heaven is a place, yet doubt the fact of mutual recognition, because that is not stated, though Christ prayed, "Father, I will that they also whom Thou hast given me, be with me where I am." This is an idea of revelation that takes from religion all that is spiritual; for to require to be told everything from an external source is to receive nothing from our Father's Spirit. Is not this to make the Bible an instrument of suppression and obstruction towards the spiritual truth that may legitimately be drawn out of itself? For is there any word of Christ that is not as a seed of faith, of life in the soul, eternal and



progressive? Christianity is the Image of God in the Person of a living Man, quickening *in* our hearts out of its fulness in his own, the knowledge of our Father's relations with us. Are we not to believe in the directest inspirations unless we can find in words what God has taught us in the spirit? Until we cease to look upon the Bible as a depository of all spiritual truth in its ultimate form, and begin to regard it as so much seed for the soul, so many pregnant and inexhaustible hints fitted to kindle our own eternal life, there can be no hope that the Bible will contribute all it might do to the advancement of mankind, and no doubt that, viewed as it now is, it is often retarding the natural course of religious progress. The morality and the theology of the Christian world, its Creeds and its ideals, are behind what they might have been, if, in this last century, the dead letter had been withdrawn, and, with the Image of Christ in their hearts, the souls of men had been left alone with the Spirit of their Father. The letter has been killing the spirit; written words have been killing the real Word of God in men's hearts. The English translation of a Greek word which scholars say has no reference to time, has kept nearly all Christendom believing in an everlasting Torturer, against *the spirit* of everything that Christ taught and showed of God, and of everything that God has said for Himself within our hearts. No learning will preserve men from such ignorance of God: rather will it expose them to it if they regard it as the key that opens the revelation. The Bishop of Gloucester, a scholar (Divine truth is not a matter of

scholarship but of spiritual discernment), once asked with a simplicity most instructive as to the effects of the theological system under which he has lived, "What could lead a man who is free from speculative tendencies to sympathize readily with the denial of everlasting punishments, if he had no guilty self-knowledge, which made it his interest so to deny?" Is it come to this, that only a speculative turn of mind, or an evil conscience, could lead a man to question everlasting punishment! May not a man have a pure heart without speculative tendencies? And do not the pure in heart *see* God? And will a man who sees God in a pure heart, in a heart which is all love—for no other heart is all pure—readily believe that pain for ever, as the doom on a creature born in sin, is one of the garments of light in which the Father of Spirits shows Himself to His children! But the day is coming when we shall receive the practical and the speculative helps together; when Christianity shall present itself not as a Book, but as the Image of God in the Person of a living Man—the Incarnation of Faith and Work; when the Bible shall be re-read in the light of Christ's spirit, and as we walk in his steps, live as he lived, pray as he prayed, we shall have the Spirit that taught him teaching us, and see the light of the knowledge of the glory of God shining in his face.

But how is it that the heart of Christendom has come to believe this evil of God? We have suggested how the theory of a local retribution and the misunderstanding of words quenching the living teach-

ing of the Spirit have contributed to it. There is another explanation: Those who think that man by nature is without God, and that Eternal Life is not by spiritual development, but by supernatural rescue with a new nature infused, necessarily conclude, even out of their piety, that since the spiritual action is all God's, where He acts the rescue is perfect, and that in all other cases the original enmity remains. And thus a system may hold together, through the corresponding unsoundness of its parts. Any real and true element in the present Faith of Christendom, such as that Christ is the Image of God, or that God is the Father and Teacher of our spirits, if allowed its free and full action in our souls, would deliver us from all that is inconsistent with itself—from all the heavy weights with which Theology burdens Religion. Surely these things serve to account for the defective operation of Christianity itself, and we must look at them out of very tenderness for our Faith. How can we defend the Religion of Jesus, or explain its halting action on the world, and be silent about these things? These are the views which for ages have had the world to themselves, to mould it as they could; and what have they made of it? Who believes that in his own person *he* is to suffer everlastingly? No one who is sane enough to be permitted to go abroad among men. If a man really believes it, and believing it falls into a reasonable melancholy, he is pronounced to be religiously mad. Their nature—the Spirit of their Father in them, though they know Him not,

will not permit men to think so hardly of God. But whilst this view of the judgment of God upon their sins is practically rejected, there is no spiritual view to take its place. The consequence is, that with the great mass of men the future exerts no influence at all upon the present; there is no law of eternal retribution which Conscience can hold before the soul. There is no natural, necessary, or just connection—I speak on behalf of God—between sin on earth and everlasting misery; the penal consequence has no spiritual justification; no one believes it in his own case, and if there is no mid-way of Judgment between escape from this and a place in Heaven, is not this to deprive the souls of men of all effective belief in a spiritual retribution?

“As one star differeth from another star in glory: so also is the resurrection of the dead.” And yet—for God is their Maker—all are still stars, and capable of light. Here is the heavenly scale, with all the natural gradations: the spiritual law of separation, with the sentence already in ourselves, when we shall stand before God, not so much for judgment—for judgment is already recorded in what we are—as for execution of judgment.

And every hour is determining our initial judgment, the form of soul in which we shall first make trial of our preparation to find our blessedness in our Father's House, and before our Father's face. Say not that since the unwasting ages of an eternal life will for ever be with us, the lost opportunities of time can always be regained. That is to forget that

immortality is only commensurate with our calling—that Eternity itself will not exhaust our possible ascent towards God. If our souls were to reach a limit, the argument, utterly immoral as it is, might have meaning; but with no limit short of God, how can we lose time, or wander from the way, and yet ever again be as far upon our course as though we had never loitered, and never wandered! Progress to the penitent will always be open; but to suppose that we can wilfully abuse our life, and yet be at some future time as if we had not abused it, is to fall back into the old unspiritual view of a local Heaven, and to forget our eternal calling. It can be no justification of delay that time is endless, if the way of our Eternal Life is endless too, nearer and nearer unto God. The essential matter is whether really we have our life in Him. If we are born of Him we shall go on unto perfection, desiring no arguments, pleas, or excuses, against the blessed leadings of His Spirit.



## XXI.

### Christ's Law of Love to our Neighbour.

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MARK xii. 31 :

“Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.”

WE are required to love God with all our faculties, to find in Him the end and rest of every affection we possess ; we are required to love our neighbour only as we love ourself. There is a great difference here. We have to love God with all our heart, because the heart that delights in goodness finds in Him the perfection of goodness ; but neither our neighbour, nor ourself, may have any claim to Love upon that ground. We have to love God with all our soul, because the spirit in us that delights in the beauty of holiness, in purity, in rectitude, and inviolable law, finds in Him the source and the fulness of these high desires ; but neither our neighbour, nor ourself, may possess any of these great qualities that would attract the loving reverence of spiritual beings. We have to love God with all our mind, because the powers that are delighted, strengthened, and developed by the contemplation and search of truth are kept humble and healthy only through their devout

alliance with ONE who is true, as conscious students and worshippers, not of abstractions, but of the living and eternal Reason ; but neither our neighbour nor ourself may have any capacity for feeding the love of those who are seeking the life of thought, or helping it towards its rest in Him who is its supreme Nourisher and inexhaustible Spring. We have to love God with all our strength, because we are inspired with a desire to imitate Him who is the God of Reality ; because we are not creatures of affection, or contemplation, or speculation only, but have a practical conscience, faculties of action, shaping powers of the will, that involve us in clear sin and inevitable remorse, if we do not labour to make the facts of our life correspond with the spiritual patterns and ideas that are in our souls, to have His holy Will done upon the earth, and to establish His kingdom of Heaven even in the midst of the world ; but neither our neighbour nor ourself may be fit objects for the high love that is awakened by those who are standards and examples, who can communicate the kind of power which belongs to those who are fellow-workers with the Father ; sharers, not in the inspirations only, but also in the life of God, working *out* with effort and joy whatever good thing God works in them. Not to love God in all these ways would be to imply that the faculties of feeling, thought, aspiration, imitation,—of heart, soul, mind, and strength,—were either dead, or knew not that *He was* the fulness of their desires ; but all these faculties might be in a state of very high activity, and yet not find in our neighbour the

qualities in which they could delight, which would satisfy their affections in the same sense—I speak not of degree—in which God satisfies them.

And so no such impossible demand is made, no such sentence of degradation, for such it would be, is passed upon us as the requirement to love our neighbour with all our heart, and with all our soul, and with all our mind, and with all our strength; for this would be to deprive us of an infinite Object of love and aspiration, to shut us up within the idolatry of our own nature, to make our spiritual affections stop short of God, and find their end and rest beneath the perfect. We love God as the Perfection of Being—the absolute fulness of that spiritual existence whose germs are in ourselves, the Source and Nourisher of some portion of His own holy and eternal life within our life; and as He is *One* Being, for so Christ prefaces the commandment: “Hear, O Israel; the Lord our God is *One* Lord;” as there are not Gods many and Lords many, the love He is fitted to inspire knows no variations according to persons, and is placed at once at its height: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength:” but with regard to *men*, they are not one, nor of one character; and so the commandment which enjoins us to love them all is necessarily limited to that quality of love which even the lowest of them is fitted to inspire, and requires that we love our neighbour even as we love ourself. For, how do we love ourselves? Not for the goodness that is in us, with

the delight of a moved and grateful heart ; nor for the holiness that is in us, in the reverential contemplation of our own spiritual rectitude, with the affections of the soul ; nor for our insight into God's thoughts, for the reach of our knowledge, for our empire over Truth, for the harmonies between our reason and the universe around us, with the love and worship of the mind ; nor yet for the glow of life that pervades our being, and sets all our energies to turn our aspirations into spiritual fact and substance, for the sake of the joy that comes out of a strong and devoted will, making sacrifices of the lower things for what it holds most dear ;—not in this way, nor for these things, do we love *ourselves* ; and so, therefore, we may not withhold our love from our neighbour because he cannot be loved in this way, nor for these things. We love ourselves by desiring our own blessedness, by wishing and seeking our own good, by shunning and deprecating needless pain, pain to which we are not called by submission or conformity to God, or by love for man ; and this is the lowest love we must feel for our neighbour, to have benevolent affections ; and as the test of such affections, where opportunity is, to render beneficent service towards all mankind. I say the *lowest* love, because there are many men who are worthy of a higher love, even of some measure of that kind of love with which we love our God. We desire the fulness and joy of our own life ; we desire, if it may be, to taste the full cup of God's blessings, and to that end we desire the free exercise of every natural right, to be untrammelled in the use and development

of whatever endowments we have directly received from our Father in Heaven. We desire from those of our fellow-men, with whom we are brought into alliance, such aid and sympathy as they can give us without incommensurate pain or injury to themselves ; we desire, in as large measures as we can receive them, the goodwill and friendliness, the kindly sympathies, and gracious courtesies, and generous constructions of other beings ; and we deprecate all wrong, all injustice, all unkind suggestions or misinterpretations, all inconsiderate or wanton evil ; and by every law of reciprocity, by every honest affection and natural sense of right, by every claim we can be conceived to have upon God for the fulfilment of these desires for ourselves, we are required to desire for others, and for all others, the same enjoyment of *their* being, the same liberty to make full use of all the privileges of their nature and condition, the same friendly sympathies, and gracious regards, and kindly help, the same protection from every measure of injustice.

There is no conceivable circumstance, no change in a man's inward character or outward condition, that ought to deprive him of this degree and quality of Love. Whatever he may be in himself, though degraded by every vice,—whatever he may be in his relations to us, though inflamed by every malignant passion, and clothed with an accidental power of wounding us where we are most vulnerable, it is impossible, without approaching to his level, and partaking of his malignity, that the desire for his good,



the best desire that we entertain for ourselves, should ever cease ; and the more imminent seems the utter wreck he is making of his peace, the more of earnestness will naturally be breathed into our wishes and, if the way opens, into our efforts for his rescue. The desire for his good will include the desire for his reformation, and, of course, for whatever spiritual experiences are essential to that result ; and if some shame and suffering must belong to such a process, it is not the suffering that we wish for him, but the renovated nature and the new life, the new wisdom and new health, to which it leads. It is impossible to frame a case in which we could be exonerated from desiring a man's well-being ; and if we are enlightened enough, and pure enough to place our own well-being in our spiritual life, in our fidelity to God and to duty, it is impossible that *this* desire for our neighbour should not close and crown, and indeed hold in subordination all the other desires for him that benevolence can form.

I do not know what is meant by the love of ourselves, in any good sense, but having a desire for our own peace, our own perfectness, our own blessedness—meaning by that our openness to God, our fitness to receive of His best gifts—and in this sense, to love others as we love ourselves, to desire their blessedness as well as our own, is surely the very least degree of goodwill that man owes to man, the smallest measure of affection that is compatible with the absence of malignity, and with the sense of a universal Father in Heaven. I purposely use the

expression, a desire for our *blessedness*, as the legitimate form of the love of ourselves ; not a desire for our happiness, for the word happiness is susceptible of, and may suggest a degraded meaning ; and often the deprivation of happiness, the loss of what is dearest, leads to blessedness. To love others as we love ourselves, to desire their well-being, to be grieved by their sorrows, to rejoice in their blessings,—this is not *all* the love that human beings *may* claim from us ; it is the very smallest degree, and lowest quality of Love, which the most indifferent man, as soon as he becomes an object of distinct interest and contemplation, must instantly command, and which the worst man in the most unfriendly relations cannot be denied, unless malign or vindictive passions are present with us. If we loved no human being for better reasons, with an intenser satisfaction, a higher quality of love than we can love ourselves, then none of our higher affections could be gratified by men, except the goodwill that springs from kindness and rejoices in universal well-being ; for this surely, except in a bad sense, is the only love that we have for ourselves ; we are only one of the objects of our own goodwill. We cannot love ourselves for our goodness with the love of the heart, nor for our holiness with the love of the soul, nor for our wisdom with the love of the mind, nor for our own actions with the strong delight of the will in god-like reality and fact. But *there are men* whom we may love, and whom we ought to love, for all these reasons, with all these affections—men who are worthy of grateful honour, of spiritual rever-

ence, of kindling admiration, brothers to all men, meek children of God, yet heroes of goodness ; and these we love, not as we love ourselves, but rather as in these things they reflect the image of their Heavenly Father with some measure of the love we have for God.

There are no doubt many *bad* senses, in which, as we say in our imperfect speech, a man may love himself—vainly, selfishly, sensually, blindly, idolatrously ; but none of those were in our Lord's meaning ; and there is no good sense in which a man can be the satisfying object of his own love. In fact, then, there are many men whom we love with a far higher quality of Love than Christ has asked from us for all men. When we find in others satisfying objects for our love, we love them for *themselves* ; *they* are personally dear to us ; and though we desire and seek their happiness, and might make any sacrifice for it, *they*, not their happiness, are the objects of our affections. But there is no intelligible sense, except a vain or a vicious one, in which we can be the satisfying objects of our own affections, though there is a just and natural self-love which is not, and cannot be, indifferent to our own well-being. When we love ourselves, unless indeed we are in extreme need of God's compassion and of all men's pity, we do not love our own character, or make ourself an object for our own moral affections ; but when we love a good man, we desire his well-being indeed, but it is the man *himself* who is the object of our love.

Now, whilst perceiving that Christ requires, and

legitimately requires, universal Love and Goodwill, let us lay no unnatural burdens, no yokes that Christ did not lay, and that no genuine man can bear. There are men who, without some change in their existing character and sympathies, could not become to us the objects of personal affection; on whom heart, or soul, or mind, or strength, could not delight to lean or rest. But Christ's Law does not require that we should experience this, or that we should attempt it; it requires us, out of the spirit of pure Love that is in us, out of our reverence and appreciation for the nature that is *in them*, and, to use an expression of Roman Catholic piety of great force and compass, for the sake of the honour of God, that we love them as we love ourselves, that we desire their good, and desire it with the same sincerity and consistency, with the same freedom from malice, that we desire our own. To this Love, in its spirit and in its truth, all men have a right—for otherwise we have no claim ourselves upon God's Love; this Love no heart can withhold from any without dropping out of fellowship with Him who is Love. But God does no violence to our nature, and that other Love which, in their measures, goodness, holiness, consecrated thought, devoted self-immolating service, win from us, cannot be given at our will, and is the rightful property of those by whose personal gifts it is inspired. And so this Rule, which is often represented as inaccessibly high and severe in its exactment, asks for all only that Love which no good man can refuse, and asks for none others that kind of Love which only good men can inspire.

In fact, unless this second Commandment is held in the closest dependence upon the first, it will prove a very imperfect guide to the wise discharge of our brotherly duties. For until we know and love God, we can love ourselves only with a blind instinct ; we know not where our real blessedness is, and in loving others even as we love ourselves we could cherish for them only poor and ignorant desires. It is after our spiritual nature has been awakened to the love of God, and is fixed on Him as its end and rest, that to love others as we love ourselves becomes a perfect practical rule, as well as a right affection ; for then only, to consult for their happiness as we consult for our own includes their *true* blessedness, and makes *us* their friends and helpers on that course. For if we first love God, then what is the nature of the well-being that we desire for ourselves ? To be in His image ; a well-being that has its sources in His nature and affections ; a life rooted in and drawn from Him ; some sense of fellowship with His Spirit, of the blessedness of goodness, of the beauty of holiness, of the majesty of truth, of the glory of disinterested action. This is the blessedness of Him, the Blessed for Ever, to act from holy Love ; and all who love God desire to share that blessedness, and through participation of His Spirit to be children of their Father in Heaven. "Love your enemies," says the great Interpreter of God's Love, "bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you ; that ye may be the children of your Father in



Heaven : for He maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do *ye* more than others? do not even the publicans so? Be ye therefore perfect, universal in your Love, even as your Father is universal in His Love." And thus the two Commandments really resolve themselves into one, that he who loves God love his brother also. The second is the issue and the test of what is involved in the first; for he who loves God desires to be in communion with God—desires to have his blessedness in being good as God is good; and this is the disposition whose delight it is to make happiness, and which finds the joy of existence in disinterested Love. If a man so loves God that he responds to God's Spirit, *that* implies that he does love others even as God loves them, and finds his blessedness in Love, and finds it more and more as Love directs and consecrates all his faculties—consumes, purifies away, subdues under itself, whatever habits and affections are mere self-seekers resisting the sacrifices Love requires for the fulness of its action.

It is not necessary that we should get entangled in any casuistry as to the legitimate extent of a man's love for himself; the only practical interest is, in what does he make his true good to consist? He may innocently desire for himself any blessedness that flows out of the affections with which he loves

God ; he may innocently avoid any pain that does not come to him in the service of God and man, or in the culture of that strength which fits for service. Christ uttered the Laws of his spiritual kingdom under the form of Beatitudes, and however little a good man may think of his own happiness, he is so far from being careless about his peace, the Peace of God which passeth understanding, that there is no other man so willing to sacrifice everything else that he may save it ; who at such great cost of what is called pleasure will carry out the desires of his spirit ; who will so keep and augment his treasure, and guard his essential blessedness from corrupting blight or taint. Apart from casuistry, and apart from unnatural requirements, the broad difference between a good man and a selfish man is in the moral difference of the affections and desires, in the indulgence and the exercise of which is the joy and the end of their existence. To say that a good man did not find blessedness in his goodness—I am not speaking of happiness or pleasurable sensations—to say that he sacrificed his peace to his duty, to say that another course would have brought him more of joy, would not be to raise but to lower him in the scale of goodness ; for so far as he is a good man, he could take no other course without opening a fountain of bitter remorse and misery in his own nature. A good man does indeed make many sacrifices ; he sacrifices anything that is lower to the one thing that is highest ; he sacrifices anything else to keep his peace with God, at the clear demands of those affections whose end and rest

is not in happiness, but in goodness, in holiness, in truth, in spiritual reality. He seeks first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and God adds the blessedness unto him.

If there is any man who labours in Love and finds it a hard service, that not yet does the blessedness repay the cost, that not yet is the yoke easy and the burden light, that is only a sign that not yet is Love made perfect; let him not turn back, let him pray for perseverance, let him go on strengthening his better affections by trusting and by acting upon them, and God will assuredly reward him. How? By giving him such increase of Love, in purity and in measure, that it will deliver him from the lingering bondage to self which now restrains the fulness of his peace. A selfish man is one whose affections and desires centre upon his own comforts—he is *his own* object. A good man is one whose affections have *others* for their object; to whom Love is a spring of action that stirs him with a force no selfish interest can exert; the denial of which for the sake of the ease it might disturb would be like bartering life for a day's food and raiment; to whom the indulgence that might be obtained by the neglect of kindly offices to men would be so opposed to his own sense of right, to his feeling of that wherein our life consists, so darkened by the consciousness of a broken fellowship with God, that it could not be taken or enjoyed.

The best Love we can have for ourselves is in the desire that *we* should be able to love as God loves, freely, purely, wisely, blessedly; and of that Love,

when we have drawn it down from above, our neighbour is the object. But who is our neighbour? Christ has answered that question. The good Samaritan finds a neighbour where he finds a suffering man. "Go thou," says the Saviour, to whoever would waste the time of action in cavil or speculation, in vain talk about goodness when the work remains undone—"Go thou and do likewise."

And Love shows most like to God's when Love has no motive but Love, when our object is to impart a blessing, not to seek our own. And goodness is at its height when it is exerted in the most difficult circumstances, and we love those who most need our Love—the unhappy, the ignorant, the helpless, the sinful. And we love them best when we apply our Love as God applies His grace, by the direct action of spirit on spirit; when Love makes us seek personal relations with them, when we do not hide ourselves behind the machinery of benevolence, but trusting in the affection more than in the things it has to give, bring heart to heart, mind to mind, face to face, and try the whole force of our spiritual power; when, not content to palliate, we desire, as with the healing Love of God, to close sources of evil and open fountains of good.

No doubt he whom we find in the most urgent need is the nearest neighbour to our love; but as a rule, those who are brought into close personal connection with ourselves through any of the natural relationships of life, seem to be marked out by the Finger of God as the objects of special thoughtful-

ness. There are in the present day many *large schemes* of benevolence, all of them more or less liable to abuse, all of them founded on some view or principle which in its working may prove to be defective. I can therefore understand many good men and women standing apart from large systems and large machinery in some perplexity of spirit. They do not see their way through the complications of a scientific benevolence: it may prove a mistake; it may do more harm than good. They can only trust themselves to take the step that lies before them, to heal the wounded man who is thrown in their way, to express the kind feeling and do the kind act for which the opportunity presents itself. Each has his own gift and his own fitness; there is no safer, perhaps no truer, Love than this; and if each of us filled our own place of Love, the place that God provides in the clear opportunities He makes for us as individuals, which He brings under our very hands, and lays down at, or within, our doors, there would be little left for those larger schemes to accomplish, into which, however pure our feeling, the possibility of theoretic error more readily enters, and with such disastrous results. In the immediate home, in the outer circle of the family, in the converse with individuals which the varied forms of service, and the needful intercourses of life naturally bring; in the ever-widening relationship with men of all conditions which thus springs up unforced, are the occasions in which personal interest arises, in which neglect of opportunities is most clearly to reject a call from God



and Nature, in which Love may apply itself to do good in the most fitting circumstances, and with the fullest knowledge and power. Closely should we examine our own hearts, and inspect our own lives, to discover how many of those clear claims we are disregarding, or how little our affections are toned and eager for such natural service—lest instead of loving our enemies, and doing good to those that hate us, it should be found that we are not even loving those that love *us*—not even providing for those of our own household, with a self-denying tenderness, with a wise, thoughtful, and earnest care.

And the one thing needful is that we feed our hearts with the love of God and of goodness, until it becomes our moving affection—the element of blessedness in which we live ; for it is the selfish *temper* that works selfishly ; no man can do the works of God without the Spirit of God, and out of the heart are the issues of life.

## XXII.

### The Lordship of Service.

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JOHN xiii. 12-14 :

“ Know ye what I have done to you? Ye call me Master and Lord : and ye say well ; for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet ; ye also ought to wash one another’s feet.”

ALL religions before Christ had their rituals—a prescribed external service through whose forms efficacious worship was performed. Christianity has none : its service is Christian life, filial and fraternal ; the Beauty of Holiness the ritual in which it embodies worship.

There is a period, in the history of the individual, as of mankind, when it is necessary, instead of a shaping spirit and fruitful principles, to give specific directions prescribing particular acts. It might be to little purpose to tell a child to live in accordance with the Law of Love, and leave him to discover for himself what courses of conduct that Law requires. He alone, however, is a fit moral instructor of childhood who so prescribes the external act that the spirit, the sentiment, the affection from which it proceeds is constantly developed in the young heart, and becomes at

last the best suggester of its own deeds. The Prophets never hesitated to cast aside the rind of custom or ceremony and to penetrate to the sources of fresher life. The Old Testament is a statute book, with the spirit of the Law shining through it : the New Testament is a record of inexhaustible principles, illustrated by examples. The Law of the Spirit of Life works now in every Christian heart, and daily writes afresh on living tablets the changing letter of duty. Law was by Moses ; grace and truth are by Jesus Christ ; whilst we move under constraint and direction of outward enactment, we are not yet *his* ; we become his when we have in ourselves the seminal principles of all goodness, the self-developing germ of perfect man turning ever towards God as a plant turns towards the light.

There is an essential connection between our morality and our religion, for a true life is that which corresponds with the highest sentiments Faith opens to us of our relations with God and man. In every genuine man his life aims to be a transcript of his spirit : his duty is breathed out of his faith. If he believes in a Father's providence he does not live in miserable fears : if he worships a spiritual God he does not approach him through a priest. Positive religious institutions always co-exist with unworthy conceptions of God. These elementary rules having no inexhaustible power to bear ever new fruit unto life eternal, when at their best, act as remembrancers of customary dues ; when at their worst, as accredited charms. As spirit becomes known to spirit, person

to person, God to man, all this disappears. Religion is then strong enough to live in the natural fruits of its own spirit. It requires no longer an artificial representation in regulative or symbolical institutions. Worship becomes the self-devotedness that springs from quickening views of God ; His service perfect freedom, for it is the homage of the heart appearing in the life. "Pure and undefiled religion, before God, even our Father, is to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep one's self unspotted from the world." The ritual of religion is then the fruit of God's Spirit ; the evidence that He is with us and in us is in our beneficence and purity. St. James does not say that religion is the same thing with morality, that piety is the same thing as charity and cleanness of heart, but that the worship of God—real, not ceremonial—is to act in His spirit and to grow in His likeness ; that the only honour we can do to Him who is above all height, the only service we can pay to Him in whom is all blessedness, is to love His children, and to sanctify His image. "Religion" is not used by St. James for the inner sentiment of God, but for the worship that is the spiritual fruit of that sentiment, to become holy as God is holy, and merciful as God is merciful. "The children of God are manifest in this : whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother."

If religious life is thus the transcript of religious faith—a fellowship with the Heart of God towards all creatures and all things—what are the great relations

which Faith reveals as existing between man and God, and through their fellowship in God between man and man? Simply, our relation to God is a filial one; our relation to man is a brotherly one. It is not amiss to state thus briefly the elements of the religious life. Our morality is invigorated and refreshed, adorned with a living grace, when it is baptized anew at its primal springs, its fountain-head. Such is our faith; and he is an infidel, in the only proper sense of that word, whose life denies his faith. To such relations only one spirit corresponds. Let this at least be laid up in our hearts as certain, whatever may remain doubtful,—that duty to God is filial devotedness; that duty to man is in the brotherly affection that desires to bless him and to do him good. Whatever may be the right workings of this spirit, about which there may be much legitimate difference of opinion; whatever may be the wisest ways of acting it out in the complicated details of human circumstance, which may often be a most arduous inquiry; whatever may be the special directions and efforts by which it may have a grand, healthy, and fruitful life of blessed deeds, still we have touched a fundamental fact, that the spirit of holy love is the well-spring of goodness and of good living; that whatever is conceived and done in this spirit is moral, Christian, and godly; that whatever is conceived or done in forgetfulness, or violation of this spirit, is immoral, unchristian, and ungodly. Here is a test which a man can always apply, if not to the wisdom of his measures, to the spirit of



his being; and if he ever suspects that another sentiment is prompting him, let him at least cease from speech and action, until by communion with God, he recovers a right heart. And whatever outward act, or natural expression of itself, this right heart suggests, as the flower of holy charity in us, let us be flexible to its bidding, for thereby come grace and truth into our lives; therein is our only way of being not dry copyists and imitators, but having in our own personality some genuine reflection of God.

Perhaps the main cause of the low state of character, whether we regard the dimensions of our goodness or the efficacious grace of its performance, is that we are not borne through the details of our existence by any spring of life, by any germinating spirit that would give organic development and symmetry to the natural flow of being. Outward law, custom dead as frost, presses upon us, and we live not from inward springs, from the Spirit of our Father in us. Habit, fear, prudence, convention, a haunting apprehension of what is expected, or, it may be, a strong and honest purpose to do what is right without any burning love for doing it, or fine perception of where it lies, shape us from without; and so there is neither health nor beauty in us—for health and beauty are from inward force and grace. We become dry, measured, and wearisome—wearisome even to ourselves, because there is no well of water in us springing up into everlasting life. We go through the details of what we deem our duties, of

what are our duties, without always knowing or feeling the spirit of which they are the details ; and consequently the fresh impulse which makes all things new, which in a *living* heart can make the most familiar thing, the word of welcome, the household smile, the morning greeting of daily custom, as fresh and gladdening as the morn itself, has no operation, and details tamely repeated, emptied of the spirit which gives them natural beauty, become oppressive formalities, the lay figure of a Christian, vestures and externals, without the animating soul that moves the drapery into living curves of grace. Many are the conscientious persons who pace the rounds of accustomed duty with unceasing toil, and yet shed no refreshment upon any heart because some natural charm is absent ; and often to themselves must their lot seem hard, when they see others who, perhaps, do much less, yet, because they do it with a fresher spirit, win a more grateful love and exert a more benignant power. Without the gracious feeling that is the soul of action, the most conscientious may be felt as formalists, and suffering the formalist's fate, become weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable. The poor child of superstition, who reckons devotion by the number of the beads instead of by the throbs of the agonizing heart, doubtless finds some way of effectual working with the all-pitying grace of God, who sees when we are doing our best, and for Himself needs nothing from us ; but the most unceasing painstaking, without the inspiration of Nature, without the charm of the living soul looking out through the

deed, is apt to be ungratefully received by the dry heart of man thirsting for refreshment. For on others, on those especially that need it most, the power of the Christian life is in the spirit that is vividly communicated, and not in the statistics of work.

The word *duty*, which expresses the business of every man's life, has with most men no one meaning. It means a vast number of things, but what the one thing is that is common to this vast number, and makes them duties, is not clearly felt. And so men learn their duties by a kind of tact; their virtues might be catalogued like articles of furniture; their character is a series of accretions, with no organic life the product of one root. Wherever this is the case, and it is very near to us all, we have adequate explanation of any amount of dryness and poverty of being, of the inefficacious lives of all who are sterile at heart, who put works above faith, the letter above the spirit, the outward and visible sign above the inward and invisible grace—who are yet in the Judaism of religion, and, not having the spirit of Life in Christ Jesus, cannot do his gracious and wonderful works.

The law of Love, then, is that which alone can conform our lives to the eternal relations of our souls. And the life of love to God is in receiving His holy Image; the life of love to man is in doing him good, and in doing him pleasure, through all works of earnest beneficence, and all acts of gracious courtesy. He who wills that his soul shall be open as a mirror to the Divine perfections, with every known stain and

soil carefully removed, that it may reflect God more perfectly; he whose life is moulded by a hearty desire to contribute to the essential well-being and to the innocent happiness of mankind, throwing himself as a shield between other hearts and avoidable pain or degradation, whatever he may be in other respects, in knowledge, capacity, or practical power, is in principle, at least, at the springs of character, a religious and a righteous being.

And here it is that the spiritual nature begins to move the intellectual nature, and, to serve its own great purposes, calls the whole being into action. The Love of God is the loftiest instigation to all knowledge—the spur and the reward of devoted effort to draw nigh to Him in sustained contemplation of His thoughts and works. The Love of man is the most powerful motive for seeking all practical wisdom, all helpful accomplishments, as the means and instruments, the hands, the feet, the eyes, the speech, without which our good desires are ineffectual, halt, maimed, dumb, and blind; for the most difficult questions are opened by the honest desire to serve our fellow-creatures, as to how this principle of Love, with the most of good and the least of evil, may promote its own ends, not by the abundance of its self-expression, but by the benefits resulting to its objects. And this is an inquiry to the solution of which right feeling is of itself not adequate, and in which, if it is honest, it will summon to its counsels all the wisdom it can command. Here, indeed, in circumstances capable of being defined, there would

often be great use in rules of conduct, if they could be rightly framed. They would be directions setting forth the special acts and means by which Love may practically realize its own purposes, teaching Devotion how, under the various forms of God's discipline, it may become Holiness in spirit and in truth; teaching Benevolence how it may pass into Beneficence—the desire for good how it may be and do good. It is evident, however, that rules, except in the form of the most barren generalities—precepts rather than rules—cease to be applicable to circumstances that are continually varying, and in which no two cases are exactly the same. The method of accomplishing good, of fulfilling Love, that is best for one man and for one condition, is no guide with another man or in another condition. That great class of duties which arise out of our social state, out of what is called our civilization, can never be made the subjects of permanent rules; at least, if the rule is at all of the nature of a practical direction, though we may attain to guiding Principles, Laws of Moral Science, in conformity with which all rules must be framed. No one will pretend to know by what practical measures Society may best be served a century hence; what, for instance, will be the social, the sanitary, the educational, the artistic and æsthetic wants of this great community a hundred years from this day. No one, therefore, can be qualified to bequeath practical directions to the next century, to carve out the precise channels now in which the spirit of goodwill is then to flow. The poor, indeed, we shall always



have ; and, therefore, schools for their children and hospitals for their sick are wants that may prospectively be provided for, but not schools in which the mental opportunities provided for the child of the working-man are to perpetuate the unworthy conceptions, the pride or the fears of an outgrown civilization, nor hospitals prescribing the methods of to-day. A loving spirit to move us, scientific knowledge to guide us, are the wants of our Christian Life, but *no rules*, unless the rule is, like the physician's prescription, written for each case—useless, and probably perilous, for every other. At no time—not even under the Master's eye—did Christianity in the application of its principles, in the works of its spirit, remove responsibility from the individual conscience to take it upon itself. Much less did it enact under what forms the Love of God, the culture of the religious Life, the good of man, are now to be sought and pursued. Not even in ecclesiastical affairs, in that great part of our education and our interests which is outwardly represented by the institution of a Church, has Christianity left us one word of definite guidance. Each of the three leading forms of Christian Churches professes to find in Scripture the Divine model of its government, and each finds there only what it brings. The Episcopalian finds that there is mention of a bishop ; the Presbyterian that there is mention of an elder ; the Independent that there are various signs of local freedom and of corporate acts ; and each of the three puts the whole of its own complicated system into one or other of these really

equivalent signs and words, and is blind to the equal authority that remains for the others. Whether a Church provides for its various offices through Bishops, or through Presbyteries, or through Congregational authorities is a question of pure expediency, the solution of which depends on the fitness of circumstances, and upon which, as involving no spirit or principle of Life, the New Testament in the way of permanent direction is absolutely silent.

The progressive improvement of mankind, along with the fresh vitality of the individual spirit, is carried on by every age having to apply for itself eternal principles to shifting conditions. If the wants and aspects of Society never altered, then we might have had precepts teaching the spirit of Love how it was to clothe itself with the most blessed results ; but this, thank God, is not a true account of the ever-new problems of things to be done, the ever-new theorems of things to be explained, that God, for the education of new generations, is for ever introducing afresh into human life, and therefore universal Rules are impossible. There is nothing universal in human morality but its spirit and its temper. With these each generation and each man must be inwardly imbued, and grow in grace, knowledge, and power, through the responsibility of finding for themselves wise modes of action and a fitting machinery of Love, with such helps as Science and experience give.

The obvious necessity that benevolence should desire to see the right means to its own ends connects morality with individual culture ; and since a pro-

gress in all knowledge may be the necessary condition of an effective beneficence, the spiritual part of us is manifestly the lord of all the rest—not merely their superior in rank, but bound to employ them in its service, and the highest source of their activity. He is defective in Love who does not seek in his own life to pursue those plans, to perform those actions, by which the spirit of Love achieves the noblest results; and what those plans and actions *are*, we become qualified to discern only as our minds are large, our knowledge accurate and extensive, our observation quick and sure, our imagination capable of presenting to the inward eye truthful pictures of man's various wants and sorrows, so that we shall not live in ignorance of what our fellow-creatures are—our sympathies, practised and prompt, going forth out of ourselves as the Samaritan went up to the wounded man, not burning our own hearts to ashes. Of course, I do not mean that every good man attains to all this, or can attain it. I mean that every benevolent man who is regardless of this, who takes no pains to qualify himself with instrumental knowledge, is using his benevolent feelings as a form of self-indulgence, and wasting the motive-power of his nature.

Take the simplest form of a moral question. How may you serve a fellow-being who comes to ask your aid? Who does not constantly feel the difficulty of that inquiry, though the principle on which we should act—the desire to serve him, and means to serve him with—may be clear, strong, and sufficient? It needs

the largest wisdom to keep the readiest Love from doing mischief; and the Love is not true Love if it does not seek the wisdom. No doubt the alloy that is in our Charity, instead of seeking the accomplishments for *wisely* helping, will be tempted to plead this danger as a reason for doing nothing; but this is only one of the false excuses of those who did not wish to assist at the Marriage Supper of their Lord—at the Feast of Love. In what different ways would not minds of different cultivation—different in spiritual rank and insight—act upon the precept, “to love our neighbour as ourself”! With some to love their neighbour in the same fashion that they love themselves would be to seek for them distinctions, pleasures, occupations, from which a wise man would desire to be excused. With others to love their neighbour as they love themselves would be to open for them everlasting possessions. It is at least a solemn persuasive to all forms of self-culture that every other portion of our nature subserves the master-spirit of our life; that all faculties of knowledge and of feeling, all Truth and all Grace, are the agents of Love, the advisers and the ministers of the spirit of Duty, instructing us, if we can do no great thing, how at least we may do some little thing with a healing power—how to speak a word in season to him who is weary, how to wash one another's feet by the gentle fellowship that refreshes the travel-stained on life's journey, and lifts the worn spirit out of the dust.

The Pope and Cardinals reproduce at Easter Christ's beautiful symbol, by washing in public the

well-prepared feet of twelve so-called pilgrims, pouring on them water from costly vessels, and touching them with fine linen. It is for us not thus to turn our Lord's symbol of the all-embracing activity of Love into an exhibitory Sacrament, but through the suggesting grace of Christ's Charity to be quick to see what acts we can perform for the refreshment of mankind.

The personal relations of Christ to this spirit of life are close and intimate. "Ye call me Master and Lord." *He* might well say, "by this shall all men know that ye are my Disciples if ye have love one for another," who opened the sources of that love in the spiritual faith, "One is your Father: and all ye are brethren," and who *lived* the faith he taught.

He strengthened that spirit, gave it Divine support by making it the element of our Eternal Life. Love is of God, and never faileth. I am not limiting faith in Immortality to the Christian religion, and I am not denying that there are hearts which would live true to their noblest law, and sacrifice themselves if there was no eternal world at all; for this would be to insult the Spirit of God in human nature, and leave no ground for faith to stand upon; but a man's knowledge of his own frailty and slowness will at times make him ashamed to connect imperishable life with his own being, and then he looks out for supports of Faith, and learns how our nature can be enfolded in God; for there is no proof so strong of the Heaven that God wills for us all as the Heaven that dwelt in the soul of one of us—in the Love that never lost an



opportunity, that being of God was never below an occasion and never needlessly above it, from the first gracious words that fastened on him all the eyes of the synagogue of Nazareth till he washed the Disciples' feet, to express in symbols what no words could utter ; and from the cross, having consigned an earthly parent to one whom he loved, and prayed for his enemies, when there was nothing more to do or to suffer, and all the work of Love on earth was "finished," committed himself to the Love of Him whose work is never finished : " Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit ! "

## XXIII.

### Living and Dying unto the Lord of Life.

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ROMANS xiv. 7, 8 :

“ For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself. For whether we live, we live unto the Lord ; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord : whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord’s.”

“ NONE of us liveth to himself.” Of whom can this be said ? Or in what sense ? For it may be truly affirmed even of the most selfish. *Their* lives concern not themselves only ; but are to others disciplinary or pestilential. They may be their own ends, their own objects, their own interests ; but not without affecting the moral atmosphere, and becoming burdens, obstructions, tempters, offences, or objects of effort and compassion to their brethren. Under one aspect, it is a testimony to the closeness of the spiritual tie by which God has bound us all together, that no man can live apart, that his sins become the opportunities of other men, the tests of their love and heroism, the battle-fields where the noblest victories are won : under another aspect, it is the plague of all unwholesomeness that it exhales poison—it cannot live to itself, or die to itself, without oppress-

ing and wasting all that is around it. This for the most part is an unintended effect ; but it is nature and necessity. No man, whatever may be his desire, can confine his evil to his own heart, or fail to discharge his own spiritual offices without, at the least, throwing a disproportioned weight upon the moral life of others.

But turning from this unhappy sense, in which it is as true of the basest selfishness as of the highest Love that it does not live to itself, and looking upon us all as members of a Body which is not complete without us, and out of which we, apart from it, are but as separated limbs, what justification of facts, in this spiritual and Christian sense, shall we find for St. Paul's large proposition, that "None of us liveth to himself"? If this was to be taken as a declaratory statement, perhaps in regard to himself no one of us would deny that the very reverse of it would be nearer to the truth. With Christ's life for his standard, should we not rather expect St. Paul to have said, "Every man liveth to himself, and every man dieth to himself." Often there is no pretence in the world of living for any other purpose ; and if there was, some would deem it a weakness, and some would deem it a mask, and some would deem it an economical mistake. Exceptions would at once occur to us all : witnesses for God, types of spiritual completeness the earth has never been without ; men whose life passes from off themselves into the life of others ; to whom Death is but widening vision and diviner fellowship ; who living or dying seek not their own, and find a better life than they lose ;—but not in such numbers

as to break the apparent rule, far less to turn the spiritual sentiment of St. Paul into a universal affirmation. His own well-being, his own prospects, his own comfort, his own power, ease, and reputation—or if you raise the standard, his own improvement, his own knowledge, his own social weight and influence ; or if you raise it yet higher in the direction of the affections, still that extension of himself—his family, his children, his household, whose warmth is his warmth, and whose honours and reputations are all gathered into his bosom, and reflected in his face—an average man lives for these, and so he dies ; his objects, motives, and ruling passions, when they deserve so forcible a name, go down with him to the grave. That he cannot help : he dies as he lives, as we all do. No man can empty his soul of its accustomed life and estimates, and bid another spirit enter into him, or transform his spiritual frame by a volition only because the time has come when he deems that a change would be seasonable. God will not accept even our wills, unless our hearts go with them ; when they serve not our aspirations but only our present views of our selfish interests ; when they are spasmodic for an outward purpose, not the instruments of our innermost life ; when we come to the door of His presence chamber and knock, not for His ends but for ours ; not as servants and sons, but as self-seekers. In the last hours of a selfish life, by no possible disposal of things that he cannot appropriate, or carry with him, can a man set himself right with God and man, or make any atonement for his soul

unless he can utterly change it. And there would seem to be an instinctive perception of this truth ; for whether it be from the inveteracy of habit, or whether it be that the natural understanding sees the hopelessness of a mockery so monstrous, a very small proportion of those who have lived selfishly make an attempt to repair it in their death by posthumous acts. This, so far, is not to the discredit of human feeling, rather to the credit of its consistency ; for the posthumous beneficence would not imply a particle of benevolence ; and the perseverance in the old ways is rather a testimony to the ingrained continuity of character. Doubtless there are men willing to purchase Heaven by any conceivable testamentary disposal of their goods, provided only it would avail ; but seldom does God so utterly desert a soul as to permit that idea even to be entertained. In their last hours, the selfish perceive, or act as if they perceived, that though they were to give their goods to feed the poor and their bodies to be burned, it would profit them nothing ; it would be but selfishness still, world-worship and happiness-seeking, dying to themselves even as they had lived to themselves. It is a strong attestation to a spiritual instinct in man to be satisfied in his hopes or fears only by realities, that there are few such direct attempts made to mock at God.

But this living to ourselves is not confined to those whom Society recognizes as selfish. Society, indeed, has no standard of sentiment or opinion on such matters that would permit it to pass such judgments, to cast such stones, or call such names. A man must



live to himself very inveterately before Society will attach an evil reputation to him on that account. It would not be just, however, to attribute this tolerance and forbearance merely to the fear of establishing a law that would condemn ourselves ; for there is in Society much genuine and pure-minded reluctance to look with any purposes of scrutiny into the souls of our fellow-men, to be searchers of hearts and testers of righteousness ; but a man cannot look into his own heart without perceiving for what large measures of time, and in that time with what absorption of being, even they can live to themselves who yet recognize the duty of co-operation with the universal Love of God, who are aware of the sin and of the mistake of selfishness ; who know that no hour of life is righteously spent or purely enjoyed if so spent or so enjoyed as to break our harmony with the aims of Providence ; who are classed not amongst the worldly, but with those to whom God and His Law are the supreme interests. It is wonderful how correct a man may be in all his spiritual judgments, and yet how feeble may be his solicitude to express those judgments by any enthusiasm of affection or completeness of living ; even with what anxious care we may guard against having our inward nature, the sentiment of the soul, the jewel within the casket, polluted by low, sordid estimates of the objects of life, and stripped of sacredness, and yet have our daily pursuits and conversation, the tenour of our works, the crowd of our purposes accommodated to, apparently borrowed from, those very views of exist-

ence which we would banish from our inmost being as desecration and death. Men are better, purer, more spiritual, loftier in their thoughts, more independent in their being than their lives would lead you to suppose. This inconsistency affects all our relations with religion. There is something in all our hearts which none of us express in our lives—nay, which we patiently suffer our lives to appear to contradict. Our inmost convictions seem to have no sufficient vouchers, and so our religion, that within which what is deepest in us is gathered up, is set apart, not as the inspirer and guide of common life, but rather as something that is to be our satisfaction and atonement for it. It is true that so long as God is the Spirit of our conscience there must always be an ideal hidden in our being which is above our life. It is not of this necessary and struggling imperfection I am speaking, but of the inconsistency that not in outward manifestation at all do we aim, or find it natural, to express the highest life of our spirits; that we have come to regard its legitimate sphere as an inner one, and not as the Word made Flesh. That God will always be working in us something that we have not yet worked out is admitted; but it is not admitted, as it ought to be, that only in our habitual interests, only in our commonest pursuits, only in the life which all men see, can that which God works in us come to its birth at all. These are some of the bitter fruits of that wretched superstition which regards human nature as only evil, and necessary human pursuits as only secular, and so foregoes the

effort to make the man himself in his most ordinary works and most worldly employment the temple of God's Spirit and the representative of His love. If a man *must do* that which yet in itself is not capable of being elevated into a satisfying worship, a full, spiritual service to God and to man, what *can* he do but keep his religion apart, and look upon his daily life as gross. Bound to a life of material labour as most men are, they must live to themselves if a life of material labour cannot be regarded as religious and holy life, so long as a vestige of the sentiment remains that religion is something that expiates a man's ordinary and necessary existence, and not as the spirit that moulds it and finds its righteous expression nowhere else, as the principle that rules, the affection that hallows us, when we go about the meanest work that God has made necessary, and find no meanness in it, or give free way to the innocent feeling of our lightest moment, and find no levity in it. How can a man do otherwise than live to himself, if it be true that indispensable portions of human existence, indispensable offices and employments, are not living to God! Those who have called the world profane have succeeded in making it so; and those who would attach some holier meaning to religion than that "he who doth righteousness is righteous," and that "he loveth not God who loveth not his brother," have only desecrated daily life. Hence it is that we can avow and cherish respect for principles and sentiments, and yet are conscious of no inconsistency when it is not *within them* that we live, and move, and have our

being, inasmuch as the world is a bad world, and not their sphere. In this way the highest professors have thrown scorn upon human nature, to account for the grossest laxity, and to succumb to it under protest. No such thing as contempt for living to God, or for living in love, may stain our inmost souls; and yet the explicit lives we lead, and the implicit homage we pay to the spiritual law of life, may be things separate and apart. Religious life and ordinary life are not blended together in all our acts. We admit a distinction and a separation. We acknowledge the principle of a life of Love; but when we practically execute its claims it is not by our whole life, but by some act of special service, by a subscription, or a contribution, or an institution—some particular instrument we set up for curing men's souls or bodies; it may be by the tithe of our goods. We feel that it would be very dreadful to live only for ourselves and to do nothing for others, and so we do special acts for Love's sake; and, generous and self-denying as these often are, they may involve a confession that to live always to God, and always to others, and to find in that living our natural life and blessedness, is a measure of fellowship with God and Christ which we have neither attained in our character, nor compassed in our thought. For what are all our specific charitable doings but an attempt, it may be in every way a right attempt under the circumstances, to supplement what is defective in the normal workings of our established relations one to another? If Society was Christian, all our special charitable institutions would

assuredly be superseded as utterly out of character with the spiritual sentiment of our life, for every man would find his brother's claim more happily provided for. Our charitable institutions are mainly external arrangements for upholding a society whose conscience is largely awake, but whose ordinary aggregate life is all unspiritual and disordered. I am not disparaging this measure of unselfish life that exists amongst us, the aims of those who by institutions seek to abate the evils which the nominal relations of Society do not prevent; rather will these aims come with a new force to every heart which feels our ordinary life, as now actuated and organized, to be so defective that extraordinary agencies cannot be dispensed with for Humanity's sake, or even as the visible monuments of our shortcoming. I know that wherever Christianity has a voice the general conscience attests the highest law on this matter, and that the affections of a few will not suffer it to be forgotten; but the facts show that each of us should ask his own heart, How would it do, so far as depends on us, that Society should forego its organized, and therefore to some extent its mechanical benevolence, trusting that its living spirit will naturally supply what is needed, since all men exist in relations, and under obligations of mutual love and service, one to another. Are we in this sense members of one Body, finding in the actual relations that bind us together channels for the natural passage of spiritual life, help and fellowship, from man to man? Or rather do we not withdraw our spirit from this articulate frame-



work which God has made for it to flow in, and give it some special direction determined not by what is most fitting, or most needed, but by what is most convenient or most pleasant? To whom are we always ready to be courteous, gracious, and helpful? Whom are we ever willing to serve, to speak to them our kindest words, to postpone our purpose or convenience at their lightest desire? Upon whom do we bestow our knowledge, our choicest thoughts, our most eager pains? Upon those that need us, or upon those that need us not? Upon those who could do without us, or upon those who cannot do without us without interrupting the natural communications through which flows the life for God? What say our habits of Society of our not living to ourselves, but to God and for others? Is the spiritual physician with the spiritually sick? To whom most is the Gospel preached? To those who know it already, or might know it—or to those who know it not, and cannot know it unless it be spoken to them? Where most are the ministers of religion? In the houses and at the tables of the rich, or in the chambers of the poor, and in the workshops of the toiling? “Who,” says the Saviour, “would not leave the ninety and nine that are in safety, and go after the one that is lost?” How often do *we* reverse the rule; keep by the one in every hundred that is safe, and leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness unsought! And yet these habits of society in which we seem to live so much to ourselves are often rather dead conventions, than pursued for the sake of any selfish pleasure they afford.

They are not intensely enjoyed, and hang upon us only as customs. They are maintained at a cost and toil far beyond the value of their returns, and often under the conviction that they are weariness and vanity. We give up to mere usages, of which we might truly say that our soul has no pleasure in them, what we should deem mighty sacrifices of strength, time, and means, if asked for in the name of any great endeavour. It is not always from the zest or joy that belongs to living to ourselves that we are tempted to forego living to God and for others. We keep the beaten way not so much from the impulse of inclination, as from the inertia of habit. Few have the independence of character; few have the resources and strength of determination; few have the vigorous, manly genius, the insight into its spiritual satisfactions and delights to adopt a simple life. Men engrossed in the world, having no larger or vigorous existence out of their secular engagements, are apt to fall into the belief that there are no higher opportunities of life outside of its conventional and mechanical workings; that these turn up healthily only in the course of this world's interests, and cannot be more directly or independently pursued. They express doubts of one another, whether they would not rapidly deteriorate if they stepped out of the round of labour. Men who retire from some special pursuit, only outwardly instrumental to true life, are considered by those who continue in the pursuit to be throwing themselves away; and so no doubt they are, unless they retire for the sake of serving and

enjoying more truly, more directly, a higher and more durable existence. Much depends, whatever be our round of occupation, on having a pure inward eye ; on seeing clearly, amidst whatever distraction, what are the pursuits that are really imperishable, and what are the interests that are really inexhaustible ; and in a yet higher order much depends on a right choice, on a man's soul having made any deliberate choice at all ; we have amongst us every day men who, if only their aim was fixed and the way open, have enterprise, energy, and generosity enough to win a place on the too-scanty roll which contains the names of Loyola, Xavier, Howard, and their peers.

Our condition of natural dependency, one upon another, might well be an irresistible provision of God against living to ourselves. We ought to live for others, since we cannot help living upon them. By no effort can we avoid borrowing everything we have, and owing some one a debt for it. Since the first hour when the affections of others received us, when the only act we were capable of was the instinctive cry which, so far as any consciousness of ours was concerned, was sent into a blank universe with no knowledge of the Love that God had placed there to hear and answer it,—from that hour we have been drawing all that we are, have, know, or hope, from the long line of the dead and the living. In effect, no doubt, we are often living for others, when consciously we are living only to ourselves. The most selfish man on earth cannot avoid doing some

good to his fellow-men, though, because he does it blindly, he may prevent any *spiritual* good resulting to himself. A man cannot spend his own gold, however selfishly, without giving it to others. He cannot turn his own means into personal enjoyment, without at the same time parting with them, enriching others with the price of their services. In ordinary affairs we must all give at least the material equivalent of what we get. But do we this unconsciously, mechanically, and of necessity? Or do we it consciously, sympathizingly, with a clear purpose of acting in the spirit, and serving the Providence of God? It will not in the least spiritually serve *us*, that God's mighty Law works good, blindly so far as we are concerned, if we lend it no intelligent co-operation nor voluntarily throw our spirits into its blessed opportunities; if all our giving is only for the sake of getting, and all our spending for the sake of the returns. It will not even serve us that we see, with whatever clearness and satisfaction, a beneficial law in the economic world, if we aid it by no voluntary spiritual effort, introducing a new force that transcends economic power. That which God does without our will is not ours, nor to be set to our account, however clearly we may see it. And sometimes this economic insight chills or kills spiritual effort, when it concludes that, because God's natural laws work beneficently, He requires no purposed co-operation from *us*, but only a due obedience to the natural laws within our own sphere. Certainly God does not require us to assist or amend His laws; but He does require us to have sympathy with the spirit

of His character, and with the ends that His Providence is seeking in the free spiritual life of man. Because a wise self-love cannot serve itself without serving others, because He can make the wrath of man to praise him, and the remainder of wrath He can restrain, are selfishness and wrath their own justification? This is to use God's Spirit against Himself; because He works benignantly, and in the very constitution He has given to things reveals the purpose of His heart, to conclude that *our* heart is not required and need take no part in his service; and so the light that is in God's face engenders spiritual darkness *in us*. By such inversions of the truth we turn His blessings into curses; and calamity is required to heal us, to teach us on our own persons that the natural laws are not enough for our soul's health and peace. A man who reasons in this way, in word or act, has need to have all natural good torn from him, that he may learn, even through his sufferings, that what God desires for us is a conscious fellowship with Himself which natural good can neither give nor take away. For God cannot do *our* spiritual acts, though He can urge them upon us. Natural laws can affect only natural good; economic laws can operate only for economic benefits; physical laws have only physical results; but spiritual good comes out of the spirits, the wills, the endeavours of those who consciously are fellow-workers with God, when consciously we take the Law of His Spirit, the purpose that lives in Him, and make it supreme in and over us.



And it was precisely this that was in St. Paul's view when he affirmed that none of us liveth to himself, and that no man dieth to himself. He was not speaking of any persons who had attained to this perfection, but of the law of spiritual life under which we all have passed. God is our Law ; Christ is our Rule ; and whilst no more free to follow inclinations that would draw us out of accord with *them*, we are liberated from all lower authority. Their service is then perfect freedom : we are no longer free to live to ourselves, because our will has passed into a higher life. How can he, says St. Paul, who is dead to sin, live any longer therein ? We are determined, even as God is determined, by the highest life that is in us. And in the Apostle's words,—for we might fear to use such words from ourselves—we become joint rulers with God as we become His servants from our souls. We rule through willing submission : accord with the Highest is command over all that is lower than He. We obey natural law, and it obeys us ; we obey the law of labour, and it yields us its returns ; we obey God, and He is the strength of our souls and our portion for evermore. This is the great Law of Life which delivers us from ourselves and our own blindness, so that, living or dying, life and death are freed from the colours of earthly accident, and centred in God. This is the only true liberty, to know that we are not our own masters ; that a Will higher than our own rules us out of Heaven.

All this, and far more than this, Wordsworth has expressed in that great "Ode to Duty" which shows

that the whole secret of spiritual life is in the renunciation of unconsecrated will :—

“ Me this unchartered freedom tires :  
 I feel the weight of *chance* desires :  
 My hopes no more must *change* their name :  
 I long for a repose that ever is the same.

“ Oh, let my weakness have an end !  
 Give unto me made lowly wise  
 The spirit of self-sacrifice,  
 The confidence of Reason give,  
 And in the light of Truth, Thy bondsman let me live ! ”

## XXIV.

### Spiritual Gains of Bereavement.

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JOHN xvi. 7-11.

“It is expedient for you that I go away : for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you ; but if I go, I will send him unto you. And when he is come, he will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment : of sin, because they believe not on me ; of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more ; of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged.”

IT is but a truism to say that we know nothing of God until Himself has revealed it unto us ; yet in that truism is involved the necessity of communion with Him face to face. We know Him only as a Person, as a Spirit in intercourse with spirits. A knowledge of our own feelings is not a knowledge of God. The pure in heart see Him, not in their own purity, but when they know that God is the spring of their purity ; and those who hunger and thirst after righteousness know God only when they know that they hunger and thirst for that which is not in themselves ; that from One *who is righteous* comes both the thirst and its supply, and that their aspirations are not the sighings of an independent or a solitary nature, but longings after One who moves within them. If Religion is the

knowledge of God, then is it personal communion, personal dependence, personal sympathy, our measure of fellowship with the Holy Spirit ; and until this exists we walk in spiritual darkness, not having the light of Life, even though we should walk blameless within the strictest fences of the moral law. The three great lessons indispensable to man, the three great perceptions of the soul, are the understanding of what is good, the understanding of what is evil, and the understanding that the living God is *in* the one, and eternally against the other ;—in the language of the text, the conviction of sin, the conviction of righteousness, the conviction of judgment—all coming to us in the measure of our personal fellowship with the Spirit of God. From no secondary experience, from no hearsay, from no lower range of knowledge, from no ethical consideration of wisdom, prudence, and expediency—only from spirit acting upon spirit, can they be acquired.

The Disciples during the life of Christ did not participate with him in the original sources of his inspiration. He looked upon God ; they looked only upon tradition and *him*. They walked in a borrowed light, and did not perceive whence it came. They instinctively yielded to the attractions of a spiritual power the sources of which were not open to themselves. His intercourse with them was that of one who by the spell of great qualities exerts a commanding influence over those who have no real comprehension of his character, and may themselves be marked by qualities of a conflicting kind. By the

natural magic of goodness and of spiritual might they were awed, chastened, subdued ; but he and they did not drink from the same fountain of spiritual life : *they* from the traditions of their nation ; *he* from the living water. The veil that concealed from them the knowledge of God shining in the face of His Son was the conventional religion in which they lived, the tissue of Church notions which had wrapped them from their birth. They could not see the inconsistency of confounding the Son of Man with the Messiah of their local expectations. By a strange mingling of personal sympathy and of national prejudice they felt what was Divine in the Man without being carried on to the discernment of what was universal in his mission ; they blended things so incongruous as the spirit of Jesus and the Jewish Messiah. It was expedient that he should go away ; that Death and the Resurrection should destroy for ever this combination of incompatible beliefs, and whilst preserving their personal trust in his Divine qualities shed the interpretation of Heaven and Immortality upon the sources of his power and the nature of his kingdom. This was the character of the change wrought in the Disciples by the removal and exaltation of their Lord. Their trust in *himself* was confirmed, for God put His seal upon him through their faith in the Resurrection : their conceptions of his purpose were totally transfigured, in that he was gone to the Father, and they saw him no more. There was no longer coherency between a Jewish Avenger and a Prince of Life and of Immortality.



In this way the Spirit of God found direct access to the souls of the Disciples, and the Mediator, who after he had passed into the heavens could no more be mistaken for a leader of Jewish armies or a conqueror of Roman masters, drew the gaze of men upon himself only to fix it upon the Father whom he revealed.

And thus the Comforter, the Spirit of Truth, in taking away the bodily presence of their Lord admitted them to communion with his living soul. They were now nearer to him than ever they had been before. Before, they were under his commands, as servants with a master : now they partook of his inspiration, and drank at the same wells. It was expedient for them that he should go away, if thus they were to be drawn into more vital union with him,—that having life in themselves, no longer led by a force they did not understand, they might thenceforth be as friends and fellow-workers with their Lord, of the kindred of his spirit.

In all analogous cases of character being strengthened or transformed by the removal of a guiding influence on which we had leaned with too external a dependence, of whose help and sweetness we freely took without penetrating to the Divine depths where it had its spring, it is manifestly in the greater fulness of its spiritual presence with us, in more of inward fellowship that the blessedness of the change consists. It is often expedient for a son to go away from his father's house, not that he may forget it and become a vagrant in heart and spirit, but that he may value it and know it as he never

knew it before,—that its affections, its purities and prayers may have their spirit revealed to him, and no longer be regarded as things of course that have no special blessing in them. A departure from home is expedient, in the sense that our Lord's departure was expedient, only when the spirit of home can thus more fully be disclosed ; and only the wisest and the best of parents can in this way bless their child when, as by their own death, they are parted from him. It is expedient that advancing years should deliver each mind to a self-subsistence, not that we should break loose from our early guides, but that we should be taken into more intimate fellowship with them, that the individual responsibility we then acknowledge should unite us at the same fountain of inspiration and of action. Mere physical growth will emancipate from parental control, but the true emancipation is that of growing insight and sympathy, which deepens our reverence for our first guidance as we become partakers of the same spirit, and removes dependence to substitute unity, drawing parent and child to the same Father. And so it may be expedient that separation, and the great teacher Death, should touch our earthly relationships and leave us alone, but only that the undying spirit in these relations may reveal itself. In this, one of the deepest mysteries of our spirits, that we fully come to know our blessings only as they recede, is our clearest admonition of the insight that is wanting to us, and help towards its attainment ; for by these retrospective lessons when God has taught us to read what *was*

in our human life and our human affections, if our eyes could have seen it, we may learn hereafter, in some more heavenly frame, without further shifting of condition, to discern the riches and the glory of the present that then is with us. And so it is that any condition of existence may unfold its hidden treasure to us only when it is passing away, that we lose it outwardly to gain it inwardly, that its ideal and imperishable spirit comes to abide with us for ever, and that when we regain it in person it will be in a fuller and higher form. What may not be good for any of us in the way of present change or loss, if it could be good for any one that Jesus Christ should go away from him and be with him no more—if his absence was needful that it might interpret the blessing of his presence! How often do those who would have more of external help and assurance than God has seen fit to give, ignorantly desire that they had but lived in the days of the Son of Man, forgetting the parallel vanity of those blind of heart, "If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets!" How many can read the past, who cannot interpret the present! How many can acknowledge the dead prophet who would not have recognized the signs of his living power! Which of us is sure that he would have seen the glory of God in the form of a servant? Which of us is sure that he would not have been of those who said, "Is not this the carpenter's son?" We in fact are more favourably placed in relation to Christ than were his

own Disciples : by all the developments of the Life that was in him, by all the fruits of his spirit, of the travail of his soul, do we know more of him than did John or Matthew or Peter on the day that he was parted from them. Better to know the inmost heart of a friend who is absent, than to have his bodily presence with a veil between his soul and ours. No man should complain of his Father's Providence, or be in despair of himself, with whom the Past is unfolding its deeper meanings to him. Though, especially blessed are those with whom there was no spirit in their past that may not, in distincter recognition and in richer forms, abide with them for ever ; whose life flows through tracts of experience that they do not abuse even when it is an experience that they do not understand, and wanders away amid no rocks and wastes from which it can escape only by falls that leave their scars, and for long after make the course of the waters to be dark and troubled.

When Christ went away from the Disciples, the blessing that he promised as the more than compensation for his presence was that they should enter into the significance of his past companionship with them, that the Spirit should bring to their remembrance whatsoever he had said unto them, and, in the light of his death and exaltation, become the Interpreter of all the deeper things which in their natural intercourse with him their eyes had not been open to perceive. Their first participation of his spirit, their first insight into the real nature of his kingdom, was to bring with it a conviction of sin, of

righteousness, and of judgment—a conviction of their own sin, and of the nature of all sin ; a conviction of his righteousness, and of the nature of all righteousness ; a conviction of God's judgment, and the grounds of it, upon every spirit of the world kindred to that which had rejected him, because it knew not the Father nor him. This first true understanding of Christ as the spiritual Image of God, the first ray of the Spirit of Truth coming from that face now serene in Heaven, brought conviction of the incapacity for spiritual judgment in which they had been living when they had looked only for a Redeemer of Israel, when their cry was towards the earth, and not for the living God ; and yet this conviction of sin was wrought by the Comforter, and brought healing with it, because it came through the spiritual gain of fellowship with himself. When it is the Spirit of God, some gleam of holy life that entering into a man convinces him of a state of sin, there may be anguish and reproof, but there is also heavenly comfort ; it is the Comforter that does it, because it is the *presence* of Divine Goodness that has revealed our poverty, our ignorance, or blindness, and in revealing it has so far taken it away. There are other spirits that deal with sin, but as they give it no better experience, shine in upon it with no light of holy communion, they do not convince, and they do not comfort. We think to convince men of their evil by other means than by the entrance of the Spirit of God. There are spirits of rebuke, spirits of anger and resentment, spirits of exposure and judgment,



that either work no conviction at all or a conviction that degrades. Human convincers would rebuke us out of sin, but pride or shame hardens our heart against them ; some exaggeration or some harshness, which we are quick to perceive, vitiates the whole plea they advance against us ; or, if they do succeed, it is not to make us yielding, reverent, and receptive in the presence of what is good, but full of confusion and remorse, in which is no germ of hope and holier life. How can you convince a man of sin except by giving him some living experience of the beauty of the affection or the holiness of the sentiment against which he has offended ? For Satan cannot cast out Satan ; only the Spirit of God can accomplish that ; only some touch of love can melt obduracy, some feeling of holiness cast out impurity, and so convince of sin that it dies at the roots, and a new life begins. When it is the presence of God that casts out the evil spirit, He takes possession of the temple for Himself ; but when it is shame, or reproof, or compunction, or the world's opinion that expels it, there is nothing that has a Divine right to take the vacant place ; and, finding it empty and ready for their use, the evil spirits after a little, return to it again.

Now this conviction of sin, because of the presence with them of the Spirit of Truth, was to come upon the world in a way that would remove the sources of former unbelief, and reveal the unworthy causes of Christ's rejection. An entirely selfish man seeks no deliverer from his selfishness ; the conviction of sin must come first ; it is some feeling of mercy stealing

in upon his heart that suddenly opens his inward eye upon the whole character of his life. A sensual man will have no spiritual compunctions until some example of holy self-denial startles him with the knowledge of what he is, and turns the sweet fruit to ashes in his mouth. A worldly man will have no knowledge of the meanness of his being until unworldliness stands before him ; for until then he has no standards but his own, and supposes that all men weigh the interests of life in the same scales of estimation. And thus the more the Spirit of God is with us the more are we convinced of sin ; but then not without the Comforter, not without confidence of everlasting deliverance, for He in whose Light we have our life has communicated Himself unto us.

That fellowship with One who is good, which is awakened by any perception of the Spirit of God in the life of Christ, would convince us all of one class of sins—the sins of omission. Law only forbids, and says, “Thou shalt not ;” but it is another and diviner Spirit that whispers to us the good things that we might do, and makes its whispers obligations. Unless the suggesting Spirit of God is with us, we will live in the constant omission of all those graces and Christian acts which no law defines, or can define, and yet not be convinced of sin. The Comforter will convict us, when He has opened to us the Divine beauty of Christ’s life ; when, in our Lord’s words, “He has taken of the things that *are his*, and has shown them unto us.” Then will the Spirit of Truth

be daily convincing us of sin, because we are falling short of the merciful and holy things which He puts into our hearts to do ; and yet daily comforting us, for it is His own Presence with us that gives the convicting and correcting light.

And that conviction of sin which comes from sympathy with the Spirit of God in Christ, brings with it the conviction of Christ's righteousness, and of the essence of all righteousness ; that he possessed the Divine idea of what true glory is. Surely this was the needed lesson of his day, and is the needed lesson of all time,—that we should know what is the greatness and the glory of man. Far other were the ideas of greatness in which the world had faith. He was not the Power of God, the Vicegerent of Heaven, it had pictured to itself. He was too lowly, mean-born, patient, and submissive. He called no fire from Heaven. That humble, merciful, forgiving man, going to be a guest with men that were sinners, liable to insult and meek beneath it, could not be the Lord's Christ. They could see no stamp of the Divine greatness in Christ's humiliation. Such a representation of the glory of God was to the Jews an offence, and to the Greeks foolishness. Truly the world required much to be convinced of righteousness, to be instructed as to what Divine Manhood was ; and when God put the seal of Immortality on the rejected and the lowly, He acknowledged *him* whose claim to be His Son the world had refused ; in that *thus* he was the accepted of the Father, and men saw him no more, the Father avowed that

Christ's conceptions of righteousness and life were also His own. And so the Comforter came to the hearts of the humble, and "showed" them the glory of their Lord, *convinced* them that they had seen the Son of God, full of grace and truth. And still it is evident that it requires some spiritual strengthener, some inward purifier against the false standards of the world, to convince us of the righteousness of Christ, to fill and satisfy ambition with the Christian type of greatness. For wherein was he powerful? In the power of love, in meekness, in sympathy, in gentleness, in self-denial, in the might of the Cross, in faith in God and truth. It would be felt at once as a fall to a lower order of conceptions if any one was to name intellect, or genius, or knowledge among the characteristics of his greatness. Now can we say *that in this sense* we are convinced of righteousness,—that we see our nature to be complete in him; that we have no other idea of what is exalted, no other dream of greatness or of glory? The world certainly has not this conviction; the lust of power does not own it; the pride of birth does not own it: the lowest pride of all—the pride of riches, weighs human dignities in other scales. Can any of us say that through our knowledge of Christ, and of the Spirit of Truth, of eternal realities in and through Christ, we no more sink and rise upon the waves of the world? Has that Image of Righteousness of Perfect Man, so taken possession of us that our eyes are purged, and we are open no more to the false worship of power or opinion, intellect or sense, genius, wealth, or fame,

that we could pass through all the temptations of Christ, and worship only the Lord our God ?

The third conviction to be wrought by the Spirit of Truth, as men saw the righteousness of God in Christ, was that the prince of this world *is judged* ; that every form of that worldly spirit which rejected Christ is doomed to wither from the roots, as having the whole energy of God eternally against it. Nothing short of the Comforter, the Everlasting Strengtheners in men's hearts, will give and renew the conviction that *judgment* has gone forth against the prince of this world who rules through the lust of the eye, and the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life. Vainly does human law strive to convince the sinner that his sin is judged ; no suffering brings conviction, if first God has not entrance to the darkened heart. Vainly does human opinion seek to convince the world of judgment, for it can show no goodness of its own that silently transforms ; its secular judgment is not always the judgment of God ; it too often appeals to one low motive against another. Even the natural retributions of God, as distinct from the spiritual manifestation of Himself to the souls of men—ruin, exposure, pain, disease, and death, a countless multitude of avengers, traverse the ways of guilt with tribulation and anguish ; and still the world is not convinced of judgment. Only when the Comforter has first been with us can we read His own retributions aright. Otherwise, they may be terrible experiences, warnings of something wrong, but they do not change the affections of a sinful heart. When we think of many



of our own objects and pursuits, and of the passions and pursuits of men, can we say that the prince of this world is judged because the Comforter is with us? Is he cast out from the market, or even from the Temple of God, from the senate, and the council chamber, and what the Scripture calls the inscrutable heart of kings? Is it the Spirit of Truth that challenges God's judgment in the world's diplomacy? Is it the Prince of Peace who summons nations to the carnal tests, the unspiritual decisions of war? Are we ourselves so convinced of judgment, of how and where the eternal award will fall, that no worldly passions pollute the sacredness of our homes, or disturb by vain desires the spiritual contentment of our hearts? The only way of life and safety is so to use all the manifestations of God to us that we live in continual intercourse with God Himself; to obtain our convictions of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment, from the light of His Spirit in us interpreting the glory of Christ; for then, when our sin is revealed to us it will be for the comfort and deliverance of our souls; when our righteousness is assailed by false pleas of honour or of dignity, the Spirit of Truth will uncover the illusion; and if judgment proceeds from us, or silently shapes its awful form within us, it will be as God's judgment, not ours,—its holiness so tempered with love and mercy, that it will bring no judgment upon ourselves, and with the measure we mete it may be measured to us again.

## Unspiritual Objections to Spiritual Christianity.

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JOHN i. 18.

“ No man hath seen God at any time ; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared Him.”

THERE are two classes of objection to which a true Religion may be open. It may have real difficulties, from the limitations of human faculty belonging to all forms of Religion ; it may have apparent difficulties, belonging only to the position of the objector, to an impure discernment, to unjust expectations, to a conventional bias. Thus Christ himself, present in person, with all his great credentials visible to the eye, audible to the ear, livingly presented to the heart and to the soul, was to the Jews an offence, and to the Gentiles foolishness. They did not discern his essential truth and beauty ; he was not the embodiment of their desires ; he did not meet their wants as they understood their wants ; being universal Man he was not, and could not be, the man of the age, the man of the day, to Roman, Greek, or Jew. So the Mahometan, from his spiritual place, takes objection to Christianity, finding it wanting in the

comforts, the privileges, the indulgences, the prospects, and kinds of everlasting delights which he desires from a religion. So the Roman Catholic objects to Protestantism, that it is shadowy and insufficient, having neither penance nor absolution of sins at the hands of an authorized representative of God, nor the real Presence in the ever-renewed sacrifice of the Mass, nor the intercession and transferable merits of the Saints, nor doctrinal infallibility, nor any other foundation less insecure than human faith and reason. And so, in its turn, dogmatic Protestantism objects to spiritual Christianity, that it rests too much on the goodness of the Holy One, on the Fatherhood of God, and provides no certain salvation for a sinner.

All such objections exhibit only the spiritual status of the objector ; they assume his expectations to be legitimate, and accept, or reject, accordingly. They do not argue, "Your religion is not the way in which the perfect Father exerts His living energy, and is spiritually unworthy of Him," but "It does not meet what I, in my present condition, think to be my wants ; it is not so framed as to bring certain relief to me, as I feel myself to be ; it does not permit me to repeat the great Atonement, without which the efficacy of the purchased salvation, the reality of the covenanted grace, are in danger of fading from my heart ; it does not assure me that I am forgiven, for I do not know that a holy God can forgive on repentance alone, and I do not know that I am repentant : " or, "No one can be sure, from his own conviction, that he has the true faith, with contrition

and newness of life, and therefore no Religion can give peace but that which attaches salvation to a sacramental act, performed in an authorized way, and through an authorized person, so as to leave no possible doubt that you have complied with the saving condition."

All this is only to say, "I have no measure for God's truth and grace except my own view of my own weakness; I want a Religion that will provide for my helplessness and fears, such as they are—that will take me as I am and comfort me; I am ready to do anything, to believe anything, only let it bring the certainty of safety to a weak creature precisely in my condition." This is the secret of the success of all forms of external religion, sacerdotal, ascetic, or authoritatively dogmatic, that they are the refuges of our weakness, not the educators of our strength,—that not trusting to God and His holy love, to the spiritual affections, the faith of the heart, the inspiration and allegiance of the conscience, they meet the demand of unspiritual human nature for positive certainty through creeds, or sacraments, or works of mortification, about which there can be no mistake, and which hold God fast to His word.

And such objections cannot be removed by any fulness or clearness of proof supporting and adorning true Religion, for still the answer comes, "It does not meet my wants as I feel them to be; my necessities find no relief within its circle of provisions." The self-evidencing truth of Christianity was not brought home to those who felt Christ's living touch, who

heard him speak as never man spake, who saw the glory of God in his face, because he did not meet what they believed to be their wants; to them the Kingdom of God, with its aims and desires, was within a region of notions and expectations of which he was not the fulfilment. To remove such objections you must spiritually transform the objector; you must change the character of his wants, so that what before was foreign to his conditions of desire and thought may now commend itself as the food for which he hungers and thirsts. What, for instance, is gained by any demonstration of the personal unity of God, with one who believes that he wants three Divine, co-equal Persons to save his soul—that One infinite God, if He is only one Person, cannot, or may not, for metaphysical moral reasons, be able to redeem him?

In surveying, then, some of the most common objections to spiritual Christianity, I shall aim to vindicate *it* by considering the positions from which the objector mistakes the spiritual wants of human nature.

I. There was a desperate view taken of the lost condition of man, which gave material and terrible distinctness to the interposing act of a Deliverer, in comparison with which any exposition of the salvation of Christ as a spiritual process within the individual soul seemed to fade away into airy nothingness. To *us* he is a Saviour because he fulfilled the prophets and the law in human nature; the law in the conscience, through which God declares present duty—



the prophecies of faith and aspiration in the soul through which He opens the way of heavenly perfectness. With *others* he has hitherto appeared as one who removed a difficulty from God himself, and restored to Heaven a power to pardon which inherited sin had taken away; for that *before* the atoning death, the redemption by an all-sufficient Substitute, the impediment was in and with God, the penalty threatened against disobedience remained in force, and forgiveness could not be. This was the *position* from which men looked on spiritual Christianity, and objected that it did not make a Saviour necessary in any forcible sense, that in it there seemed no deliverance required, no place for a Redeemer. "No deliverance required!" What! Did human transgression come to an end with the exclamation from the Cross, "It is finished"? Are there no sins? Is there no ignorance of God? Are there no low conceptions of the objects and value of human life? Is there no slavery to evil powers and passions, no dishonour to our nature and to Him who made it in His likeness? Are there no superstitious ways of propitiating Heaven, as debasing as a fetish worship, making our spiritual food a poison or a drug? Has the unreal impression of a difficulty removed from God, by the suffering and death of His co-equal in substitution for all mankind, extinguished the impression of the only real difficulty that ever existed, and which still exists, in the spiritual condition of the individual soul? It might well be supposed that so awful a transaction, if real, provided for every claim

and closed for ever the account between man and God. "Thou shalt call his name Jesus, for he shall save his people *from* their sins." And is it possible for a man to look into his own heart, even when his heart is most a mirror for Heaven, without feeling that he is a Deliverer, a Redeemer, a Saviour, who in its desires, its affections, its will, its peace, will make it right with God?

To establish filial relations of the spirit of man with the Spirit of God is the one purpose of Revelation. Where that relation is established salvation, the health of the soul, is established; for our spiritual life is "the life of God in the soul of man." And how does God, in Christ, declare His purpose and invite His children to this fellowship? By the most direct of means—by showing one human spirit *in* these relations, and proclaiming to mankind, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased, hear ye him." The question was, and is, How is human nature related to God, and what, according to the demands of that relation, ought man to be? And God answers the question in a Son of Man who was a Son of God, leading a human life on earth true at all points of present obedience and of prophetic trusts to his Divine lineage. And by this method of God Christ is more than a revealer of Truths; he is a quickener of Life. If God could be manifested in Person, and not, as now, only through the indications of His works and the whispers of His Spirit mingling mysteriously with ours; if He could answer that ancient cry of humanity, "Oh, that Thou wouldst rend the heavens and come

down!" if we could hear His voice and feel His love in its tones, and look into His face and receive, through soul and sense, the living contact of grace and power, we might be raised and quickened by a way that is conceivable, though not possible. God cannot thus vivify by externally sensible manifestation, but He can employ a power of that kind. Though we cannot see God, we can see His image in our own nature made in the likeness of Himself. Goodness is the mightiest inspirer of goodness. Its spirit is creative; it quickens whatever Divine seeds have been planted in us. This is the highest office of Christ—to be a Conductor of life from the source of life. Our nature starts when it sees him to its spiritual functions, and "leaves all to follow him." By its vivid presentment he awakens the Divine life that is slumbering in us to spiritual consciousness. "No man hath seen God at any time; the Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he hath made Him known." It is the function of the Gospels to place us in the living presence of Christ; it is the function of Christ to carry us beyond himself into the living presence of God. And, whether we look on Christ as a Revealer of Truth, as an Impersonation of Providence, or as an Imparter of Life, is this to preach a religion within which a Saviour has no place?

II. But it is objected that this is "to heal the hurt of the people slightly, and cry, Peace, peace, where there is no peace;" that it provides for man's safety at the cost of God's truthfulness; that it leaves in force the Divine edict of "death" against "sin," and, whilst proclaiming "peace on earth" and "good will towards

men," strikes "Glory to God in the Highest" out of the heavenly anthem. This is the saddest fact that has been able to connect itself with the religion that says, "God is Love;" "Be ye perfect as your Father in Heaven is perfect. Be ye holy, for God is holy." The objection amounts to this: God would be merciful, but He cannot; holiness forbids it. Must He not keep His Word? Has He not said, "The soul that sinneth, it shall die"? And has not every one sinned, and had a parentage of sin? Hence, "the scheme of salvation," as it aptly calls itself, guarding against everything imaginable in God that might destroy us, imputing the most revolting moral necessities to the Divine Nature that it may provide for them. For some of the most nicely fitted adaptations of Dogmatic Theology there would seem to be no explanation but this: "Let the worst we can think of God be true, still the 'scheme' saves us; from all risks at His hands we have a means of escape." From our ordinary Systematic Theology it might naturally be inferred that the end of religious faith was not so much to confide in God as to be protected against Him. What but this can account for a spiritual creature, with a natural conscience, being able to frame the hypothesis that holiness may restrain the heavenly Father from accepting His penitent child; may quench the smoking flax of reviving purity, and break the bruised reed of contrite and suppliant love; that though Mercy might both move the first advances and go forth to meet the returning wanderer "whilst he was yet a great way off," Righteousness must legally

be compelled to refuse forgiveness, and, unless a theotechnic remedy existed in the tri-personal resources of the Almighty, to leave the crushed and longing heart to the outer darkness of despair. Holiness and Love are co-acting, not conflicting, attributes of God : Righteousness and Mercy for ever kiss one another. Yet, incredible as it may seem to any one nourished only on the inspirations of ancient piety, or communing with God through his own heart, I am not needlessly protesting against the teachings of obscure or obsolete fanatics. The thirteenth Article of the Church of England declares that, "Works done before the grace of Christ are not pleasant to God, do not make men meet to receive grace, and have the nature of sin." Yet I think, if we communed spiritually with God, conscience is better fitted to find absolute rest on His holiness than the heart is to understand the action of His Love, and that the one thing we should *know* of God is this, that, *because* He is holy, He will lend us the whole co-operation of His Spirit to lift us out of sinful states, to fan the smoking flax of devout penitence and breathe it into flame. I do not know what the Love of God may yet do with me or for me ; in the directions of His loving kindness I have no organ or capacity to gauge the measure or the wisdom of His ways ; I can only trust Him with all the instincts and all the insight of a nature that experience of His goodness has raised to boundless confidence. Of His Love, though infinite, I only know that it will do what is best for me, and may leave me, for my good, to suffering and shame and trial, or the long



hunger of the heart; but of His holiness I *know* its definite action—that it is ever willing to welcome the faintest emotion of penitence, to help me to extinguish sin in me—that, *because He is holy*, the gates of Heaven and the arms of God are open for every man the moment “he comes to himself,” and says, “I will arise and go to my Father.” God is one: we cannot divide Him into parts, one part Goodness, and one part Righteousness, capable of separate action, as if the All-perfect could act out of only a part of Himself, exhibiting at one time His love, at another His holiness. His holiness is love; His love is holiness; they are not separable in conception or in operation. Men do strangely and grossly err, out of a fear which makes Conscience no longer a mirror of the Divine righteousness, a fear that is not “born of God,” nor reverence for Him, but a carnal and ungodly terror for themselves, when they tell us that in trusting ourselves to His saving goodness we forget that there is an obstacle in His holiness against which their “scheme,” through the *metaphysics* of His being, has provided *them* with a protection.

“But how then,” it is asked in tremulous distrust, as though all the possible pitfalls were not stopped up, “is God released from His threat, ‘The soul that sinneth, it shall die’?” This is a conspicuous example of how the letter killeth, of the unavoidable danger of committing Divine Truth, spiritual reality, to the uncertain vehicle of human words, that unspiritual men, instead of taking the words in their highest sense, the sense most honourable to God, will take them in

the sense that is least honourable to God, a sense suggested not by their faith, but by their fear. Either these words cannot be taken literally, as threatening the extinction of every soul that sins, or, there is no possible escape from them. And in fact no one takes them literally, for the unspiritual apprehension of them is not that the sinning soul shall die, but that it shall live eternally in pain. There *is* a perishing of the soul that sinneth, in the gradual darkness that falls on Conscience when we dishonour its light, in the gradual withering of the heart when we stifle the promptings of God's Spirit. Sin *is* the quenching of the inner life, as righteousness is its growth ; the death of sin, the life of righteousness, and "the soul that sinneth, it shall die," is but the obverse of more glorious words, "He that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live; and he that liveth and believeth shall never die." In view of God's holiness, then, as in view of His love, we have but one *want*—that He with whom are the preparations of the heart should so prevail with us that we turn to Him and live. "Turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways ; for why will ye die, O house of Israel ? . . . When I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die ; if he turn from his sin, and do that which is lawful and right, he shall surely live, he shall not die."

III. It is objected by those who think three co-equal Persons *wanted* for man's redemption, and to provide society for God, objects worthy of and responsive to His love within His own being, to rescue Him from the solitude of Power, that we who rest on the Fatherhood

of God, as revealed within our souls and objectively manifested in the filial perfectness of the man Christ Jesus, do not, and cannot, know the power and presence of the Holy Spirit as He is. What is meant by this? Is it that we do not feel our spirit when prompted to any goodness to be to God's Spirit as stream to fountain; that however far we wander from our Father's House we cannot cease to be His children, and be no more "partakers of the Divine nature"? No; it is quite another system of religious thought which believes this—that another nature can be introduced, another spiritual lineage established, so that we are all, without exception, born not of God but of the evil one. "Holy Spirit" is simply the scriptural name for God when God is in inward communion with us, when He moves, and is felt to move our souls. In our souls He is at all times, but He is known as the Holy Spirit only when all our veils and alienations being removed we consciously meet Him. It is from the factitious *position* of the objector within a "scheme of salvation" without reality, as we believe, in the wants of man or in the nature of God, that we are said to have no place for the Holy Spirit in our theology. We believe that for ever, not at times or exceptionally, the Father is seeking the hearts of His children. We know that there are in us movements of His grace, pleadings of conscience, impulses to goodness, starting suddenly from a life within us that is ours only because it is His. We know that only by a sense of His presence in us do we ever clearly see how low and poor we suffer ourselves to be. Any

other doctrine of the Holy Spirit is not too much, but quite too little for us. Daily do we grieve the Holy Spirit of God, who would seal us for ever as His own.

Nothing more arbitrary, more daring, has ever appeared in connection with the pretensions of speculative theology than the hypothesis that only an eternal and co-equal Son within the Godhead could make the Father capable of feeling a Divine Love, or of being loved by the children of His Spirit. On this hypothesis—that filial love can be infused into us, only by One who, by the eternal constitution of his being having his own filial relations perfect, is also, as God, in organic communication with our souls to inlay the image, not of the Father, but of a Son, is it boldly declared that the Heavenly Father, not Himself having *filial* affections, could not directly from Himself move and fill the hearts of His children with filial faith and love. This is to strip the Heavenly Father of that which to every earthly Father is the essential property of fatherhood, the power of imparting himself to his children as direct object of their knowledge and their love. Yet on this speculative assumption there is a school of theologians who dogmatically state that we cannot know and rest in the Fatherhood of God unless He has a co-equal Son for His own love; and that we cannot love or know the power of His “holy child,” unless, as God, he is mysteriously imprinting in us his own filial similitude. From *a priori* heights this class of theologians become deductive defamers of the piety of all the rest of mankind, as neither

actual nor possible ; and from a *postulate* of their own as to the psychology of God, regardless of concrete evidence as absolved from all further consideration of facts or persons, do not shrink from pronouncing sentence on their brethren, as demonstrated certainty, "You have not, *because you cannot have*, the love of God in you." Did mediæval scholasticism spinning systematic necessities out of its own abstractions to enslave the mind and soul of the universe, ever with a more hard and unfeeling presumption speak as in the name, and from the judgment-seat, of God !

IV. It is objected to a spiritual religion which rests in the Fatherhood of God as manifested in Christ, and sees only unfilial distrust in the protections provided by theotechnic schemes which *require* "a miracle" to release the Almighty Father from a moral inability to forgive upon repentance, however deep and lasting,\* that it does not sufficiently abase us in the consciousness of sin, and of the needs of sin, before the holiness of God. If in answer to that charge we were to make any claim to humility we should be condemned out of our own mouths. To think ourselves humble would be the blindest and most offensive self-righteousness. The question is not whether we are sufficiently lowly before God, sufficiently alive to our own evil, for we know that we are not, but whether our reliance on God, the character of our Christian faith, encourage us in spiritual pride, and are indeed the reflection of our self-esteem. Does it make a man spiritually proud

\* See the Bishop of Peterborough on "The Ethics of Forgiveness."



and self-absolved to know that his sin is *personally* his own, of his own generating, of his own wilfulness, and not the universal and unavoidable curse upon his *nature* which no man can escape? Humility, so far as it relates to sin, is surely a feeling of our own sin, and not an inherited humiliation inflicted by our Creator for the sin of being born. How could He be the Father of a nature from which His image was defaced by the necessity of its constitution? I cannot feel accountable for my nature, but only for my abuse of my nature. I make no counter-charge; but surely it is the theory that by nature we are alien from God, not children of His Spirit, not born in His likeness, nor members of the Kingdom of Heaven, as Christ said the little children were, that might release a man from a feeling of personal abasement for his sins. It is in the knowledge that we are not *what we might be*, in contrite sighings after perfections we have suffered to escape us, that we hear the just reproach of God; it is in the consciousness that we permit our life to fall away from the promptings of our Father that humility consists. It is not for the meanness of our nature, but for dishonouring our nature, resisting the vocation wherewith we are called, choosing evil when good was divinely offered, that we justly humble ourselves before God. The profoundest religious thinker that has adorned the Church of England, though by birth he belonged to the Puritans, Bishop Butler, in treating of human sinfulness, makes this deep and pious remark: "We should learn to be cautious, lest *we charge God foolishly* by ascribing

that to Him, or the nature He has given us, which is owing wholly to our own abuse of it. Men may speak of the degeneracy and corruption of the world according to the experience they have had of it; but Human Nature, considered as the Divine workmanship, should, methinks, be treated as sacred: for in the image of God made He man."

But, in fact, this whole subject of Humility is so misunderstood as to degrade Christianity itself. Humility is not the posture of sin, the grace of sinners; it is the upward look to God that saves from sin. Humility is the grace of saints. The children of God, the followers of Christ, are humble, in all watchfulness and communion of prayer, not because they have fallen, but that they may not fall. Humility is our loftiest elevation, our heavenward gaze, our protection against natural weakness, our strength in God. Who would honour the disgraceful shame of unguarded self-confidence with the name of Humility? If Peter had been humble he would not have denied his Master. When his Lord looked at him, he had forfeited the holy safeguard of humility, and the tears he shed were from the bitter source of humiliated presumption, the remorse of faithless and dishonoured love. The humility of Christ would lift us to, and keep us near, himself—the humility that had no confidence even in a strength that had never fallen; the humility that arms itself with God, and with prayers, fears, and the tremblings of a holy preparation, meets the great duties to which His Spirit calls.

This charge of want of humility meets us under many forms, even the monstrous one that we claim to be saved by our own works. No one who understands what a spiritual religion is, as distinguished from ecclesiastical systems of salvation, could make that charge. How could we have our life in God, and rely upon ourselves? We might say with one Apostle, that, "As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also," and with another Apostle, "That by works can no man be saved, but by faith only;" that it is the desire in the heart, the hunger and thirst in the soul, the longing after Divine goodness, the filial trust and effort, and not the outward measure of our poor deeds, that God in His holy love accepts and blesses. We must combine the spiritual conditions, they are the halves of a completed whole; "By works is faith made perfect." Obedience, conformity to the Divine Will, is the ladder of ascent by which Faith daily gains a nearer and a wider view of Heaven. The more we know and love God, the more we know of our own imperfections.

Once more: it is said that there is a want of humility in our belief that religion and Christianity are progressive, not fixed and closed for ever,—that there is a pride of intellect in not taking the Revelation as it is. The Revelation as it is! that is, as we, or others, see it at some one moment of time! But what is fixed? and what is progressive? Christ knows no change. But may not *we* be changed into his image? Neither sight nor faith can follow his

*continued* life and growth in God, so that we ever see him as he was in his human relations as a child of God. But may not *we* be progressive? May not the veil be taken from *our* eyes? May *we* not discern more and more of the light of the glory of God in the face of His Son, as we live more and more in his spirit? Is it indeed presumption to believe that we have not yet attained, that there are inexhaustible riches in Christ, a breadth and length, a depth and height of Love which passeth knowledge,—that he might still say to us as to the Disciples of old, “I have many things to impart to you, but ye cannot receive them yet”?

We, too, might ask questions; but we abstain, because we are conscious that those who live themselves within the influence of one circle of beliefs do not always know the strength, the power, the inspiration which may be found by those who stand within another. And whilst freeing spiritual Christianity from factitious objections, that belong only to the assumed position of the objector, we would neither define nor depreciate, far less deny, the fellowship with God and with His Christ which may flow to others from modes of conception whose efficacy, or co-existence with the best life that issues from the religious heart, because they are not ours, we are not the best fitted to understand.

## XXVI.

### The Transfiguration of Souls.

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MATT. xvii. 4 :

“Lord, it is good for us to be here.”

APART from the objective reality of the vision of the Transfiguration, it would be difficult to conceive an emblematic representation more fitted to prove suggestive to a Hebrew imagination. To a mind familiar with the associations of Judaism it would teem with significance. If their hearts had drooped before when Jesus intimated the humiliations through which his glory was to be revealed, now might their courage rise again when for the displaced vision of earthly magnificence they saw their ancient symbol of the Almighty's presence, death transfigured from gloom to brightness by Moses and Elias, who died no man knew how, who were not, for God had taken them, and these idols of the national faith waiting as ministering servants upon Christ and hearing from Heaven, as attesting witnesses, the proclamation of their own subordination. Well might hearts which had fainted before regather a broken confidence, and exclaim aloud, as light broke confusedly upon them, “Lord, it is good



for us to be here." "Christ transfigured" was a kind of evidence that suited the times of the legend. It came to those who looked with the imagination at holy things, and figured the greatness of Messiah through national symbols the significance of which a Jew could not altogether escape. Christ's own difficulty with the Apostles was to reach their convictions through a spiritual evidence. Preoccupied with the most worldly anticipations of what Messiah was to be, they had no relish or affinity for what he was. Strange to say, they had no historical preparations for such a Lord, for if, as he told them, they had read their own prophecies aright, they must have looked for a king who was to rule in meekness, who would not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax, nor let his voice be heard in the streets, and yet who would lead forth Righteousness unto victory. But so completely in the long night of their degradation had the fiery trials of earthly passions burned this mild heavenly light out of their souls that all their national anticipations had become of a different order, and accordingly when Christ came clothed only in the glory of his moralities, in the beauty of holiness, of spirit and of truth, he found points of contact only here and there with the souls of individuals, appealed to none of the feelings that were most awake in the popular heart, and touched none of the sources of the national zealotry. The topics on which they were ready for excitement were topics on which he would not excite them. Slaves to his person and to his power, if the tempter had found any evil ambition in him, he could instantly have made them ;

but children and fellow-workers of God cannot be made by miracle. They were material and local in all their expectations, he was spiritual and universal in all his, and, with so little in common, it was impossible he should at once qualify them for his service, or win them to himself, by direct instruction and immediate sympathy. To imaginations of this cast, unspiritual in all their affinities, instruction may come through symbols, if the symbol carries a glorified meaning. And yet they are imaginations of this cast that such teaching may mislead and inflame. To give spiritual impressions through the senses—I mean for man to attempt it, with God it is an ever-used power, blessed and awful—is always a perilous experiment, for the language too often will only stir the material imaginations with which it is already allied, and enhance a tendency of mind that is already too strong. This was one of the great difficulties of Christ as a teacher. He could only cast in seeds of truth, waiting for time to quicken them. Of the meaning of his own life he knew that Death would be the only interpreter, that nothing else could draw away the veil from Jewish eyes. The analogy was ever before his mind : “Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone : but if it die it bringeth forth much fruit.” He could not give his thoughts of God in their own proper form, in spirit and in truth, for this requires large and prompt sympathy between the teacher and the taught. If he attempted to suggest them through lively emblems, the danger was that the emblems would call up only the images

already floating in the Jewish mind, and take the colours of the dominant fancies of the time. The Transfiguration might suggest real views of the greatness of Messiah without inflaming the unspiritual dreams which then formed the prevailing tendencies of Jewish faith. Christ transfigured, however, even if historical, would belong only to the scaffolding of Christianity, for other feet than ours. It is its inward and universal evidence, its power to meet the soul in all moments of present time, to herald it from height to height, or from depth to depth, of spiritual knowledge, achievement, and peace, that must now sustain the cause of the Gospel. Not Christ transfigured on Tabor or on Hermon, but Christ formed within us, the Image of God transfigured in ourselves, growing every day divinely bright as we are true enough and large enough to take the glory in, must now call the confession from our hearts, in rejoicing or in chastening, to Him who places us successively in the advanced posts of spiritual experience where Christ can give us light—"Lord, it is good for us to be here." When *we* are changed into the same image from glory to glory as by the Spirit of the Lord; when there is an elevation within us of the power of faith, love, meekness, holiness, then *unto us* is Christ transfigured. When in every crisis of our trial Christianity, faithful and sufficient, points the way and gives us strength to walk in it, then cometh *unto us* that voice from Heaven, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased, hear ye him,"—a Son of Man indeed, in his adaptation to all the ages, "the same yesterday,

to-day, and for ever," because as universal as the lot of humanity and the Providence of God.

Holding, then, that wherever we are, if we bring to our circumstances the Spirit of Christ, *there* it is good for us to be, we propose not to specify, which would be impossible, but rudely to classify some of the aspects of our life under which the Christ formed within us may be transfigured, the conditions of being in which, with an impulse from God thereto, we may feel and say, "Lord, it is good for us to be here."

And, first, it is good for us to be under the familiar power of our everyday life, the quiet flow of common and unagitated experience, the pressure of circumstances that only come up to the ordinary level of expectation. There is great uniformity in God's method of dealing with us. Our education is carried on not so much by the introduction of new instruments as by the constant reiteration of old experiences. The same mornings, the same evenings, the same weeks, the same years, open and close upon us ; or if there is change, it is normal change in the seasonal vicissitudes of our being. Our lives are for the most part from day to day repetitions of familiar acts, presenting the same scenes, appealing to the same feelings, offering the same opportunities. The power that makes all things new certainly belongs not to anything without ; for in an immense proportion of our external experience, notwithstanding the power of time and change, there is a remarkable sameness. But contrasted with this sameness of outward life there is an appetite in our minds that

hungers and thirsts for freshness, a tendency whose characteristic it is that it wearies of uniformity. These two opposites might seem to argue a want of adaptation, but in the spiritual result which jointly they contribute to produce there is the manifestation of educational design on the part of Him whose highest glory it is as the God of Providence, as the Father of spirits, that He develops character. A prevailing uniformity of moral experience from without, with a desire for freshness from within, would seem the needed combination to call into requisition the personal resources of the soul, to provide the gratification which is the law of its appetite, but which before it can have it must shed upon outward things a transfiguring influence of inward force through new movement or brightness in itself. God has so made us that we delight in fresh impressions; He has also so made and placed us that for the most part we obtain no fresh impressions except through a new freshness in ourselves, and a more living cry to Him for new supplies of light and grace. By these two conditions our transfiguration is sought to be provided for, and that not by force of outward influence, but by the spiritual energies of living souls. Where there is no change there is no growth. Change, therefore, is the condition of spiritual life; and the question was, How is that change to be effected? Had it come to us from without, from vivid and overwhelming circumstance, from irresistible appeals and stimulants, our nature must have lain passive under such a treatment, and no power



be called out of ourselves. It is good for us, therefore, out of the most ordinary experience to have to provide for deep inward wants, to have to work out perpetual freshness and renewal of life. It is good for us to have to make our daily engagements daily more interesting, not through change in them, but through the new spirit in which we discharge them, the new connections in which they are seen because of the fresh lights of a richer and more unfolding nature. It is good for us to have to infuse a new sweetness into daily intercourse, not from any fresh charm in circumstance, but by a brighter wisdom and love growing in ourselves—to have to provide fresh life for the affections, not through the outward appliances of variety and a more richly dowered lot, but by the unselfish spirit that makes all things new,—to have to draw from other hearts new draughts of joy, not because those hearts are changed, but because deeper fountains are opened in ourselves. It is good for us that we must find a satisfying life in the ever-new contemplation of familiar things, in the inexhaustible teachings of familiar experiences, in the infinite variety of familiar scenes, in the richer performance of accustomed duties, in the dearer recurrence of accustomed joys—that, independent altogether of the eddies or chance breezes of excitement, we are called upon to possess our souls in peace through the wisdom and the sweetness which a faithful and true spirit may gather out of the tamest sphere. These unexciting circumstances are those in which we must have life in ourselves, or rather look

solely to the Spirit of Life within us to enable us to do and to be what He prompts, but through which, if transfigured by the inner lights of love, wisdom, and conscience increasingly applied to them, He ever breathes fresh upon the heart, out of the new fulfillments of His purpose, the blessed consciousness, "Lord, it is good for us to be here."

But the ways of God are not to be calculated; no man must be able to say, To-morrow shall be as to-day. For our soul's health, for its faith and power, it is needful that we should have to stand in *unfamiliar* ways, that the routine of daily experience should sometimes vanish like the shifting scenes of a drama, and strange joys, unexpected sorrows and responsibilities, cross our path in an hour that we think not of. He is barren of *heart* who cannot draw fresh life from familiar things; but he is poor in *soul*, unfamiliar with God, who stands aghast, as one struck down at the most sudden change, the quickest reverse in lot. Nothing has taken you, says the Apostle, but what is common to man—and before it comes, God enables you to lay down the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it. It is a restless and shallow mind that lives upon outward excitement, but it is a weak nature that cannot bear it when it comes. Neither can attain to what is signally great or good in thought or in action—the lover of excitement because he wants the fulness and repose of inward life—the shunner of excitement because he cannot sustain the fervid beams of that strong light in which the objects of duty or meditation must

be set before they flash upon the mind powerful conviction, and stir our purposes to great issues. Excitement, enthusiasm, are words used without a due perception that the impulse or emotion they express admits of no common measurement for different orders of mind. What to one man is an unwonted, and if continued, an' oppressive excitement, is to another of loftier make his habitual feeling, the even tenour of his way. The larger amount of emotion and of impulse, of lofty sentiment and passion, a man can sustain without injury to the clear vigour of his practical understanding and executive power, the more noble and mighty is that man's nature. The ballast of the character is valuable for this, and for this alone, that it can safely bear more spiritual impulse, and offer itself to the full gales of heaven ; without this, the ballast is dead weight. No man should live in excitement, if by excitement is meant the unmastered condition in which judgment and reflection stagger under the stroke of feeling ; but every man should regard the quantity of feeling that he is able to sustain, and worthily to express in outward deed, as the measure of his spiritual rank,—for spiritual life is measured by the quantity of elevated sentiment which our nature is large enough to experience and strong enough to use. We often hear warnings against excitement, and it is wise and well that every mind should know itself and be contented with its place ; only, let it not measure others by itself, for the excitement under which it reels and faints may be only the calm,

vigorous, and efficient condition of larger breasts. The violent throbbings of some bosoms may be less than the regular pulse-beats of truer or mightier natures. The intensest glow of love and pity that can be induced in an ordinary man by circumstances of the most touching pathos, may not equal the constant warmth that was in the heart of Christ, or Paul, or John, and which was there not as an excitement but as their condition of habitual sympathy. This is a matter in which the lower and the poorer natures are apt to arrogate a superiority over the richer and the higher, if for a moment they are overtaken in a fault ; but caution is not wisdom, and prudence is not goodness. They are indeed the necessary, but only the negative sides of these great qualities. The spiritual law on this matter is evidently this: the more of elevated sentiment you are able constantly to bear without its amounting to an unmastered excitement, overbalancing the soundness of your understanding, unsteadyng the hand of action, tainting the simplicity of your life, the better for your nature. It is not to feel much, or to be swayed by mightiest impulses, but to have your feelings out of proportion to your powers of clear judgment and adequate performance, that constitutes unhealthy excitement. It is good for us then to be habitually learning to live under high feeling, rich faiths, and enthusiasms, as our ordinary and manageable state. Doubtless it is for this that God exposes us to terrible conflicts, casts us on sudden emergencies, makes us to pass through deep and surging waters. And if we do not

shrink from the *gradual* trials He sends, the *gradual* demands He makes on strength and nobleness of heart, this is a power that will grow with us. If we take the currents as *He* sends them, little more at first than overflowing the sole of our foot, we shall have gained the strength both of yielding and of resisting as the need is,—the right habit of leaning our vigour with the stream, or against the stream, before it is so wild and masterful as to whirl us quite away. It is good for us to be where we must gradually increase the strain we can bear without veering or tottering beneath it, to have to face the circumstances that task thought and stimulate sympathy, to be familiar with our nature in all its times of trial, to know men's souls in their adversities, to have seen every awful look of human condition, and with our own eyes beheld the outward form of every woe. It is good for us to be intimate with the soul when it is cut off from external dependencies and cast upon its own resources ; to stand by deathbeds, to see men in those hours when the world is nothing to them,—when they are pushed, as it were, from all footing on earth or on earthliness, and yet feel conscious of subsistence because in God is their life.

And this leads to the inner condition of permanent influences under which it is good for us to be—the influence of eternal things—of the *faiths* and *senti-ments* whose fulfilments are not here but hereafter, which in every day of Heaven will have fuller and yet fuller fruits through eternity itself. It is good for us to be brought under the habitual sense of *immor-*



*talit*y, of all that we sum up in the word Heaven, as the kingdom of God, a realm of life in which His Spirit rules—not for lure or threat, but that our true nature may take its independent course in the simple faith that God is the instinct of our souls. The one right use of our faith in *immortality* is neither as bribe nor as menace, but simply to free us from all disturbance about the consequences of righteous action, to give us strength to look singly at the *quality* of our life, not at all at its results. It is good for us to be wherever we may grow in this simple confidence in God and in goodness, and in whatever is involved in their eternity; to regard death as the day of our birth into a world where we shall enjoy and learn as we have affections, capacities, desires, habits of being, which will place us in fellowship with the light and love which alone have free course there; or where we shall suffer and learn as we have passions, habits, and desires which find not their home with God, in righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. And he who, in the discipline that is laid upon us all, revealing to us what is real and what is unreal, is learning through the gradual purifying of his spiritual life to obey God with the least thought of reward, and more and more out of that love of holiness which makes the righteousness of God Himself, is strengthening the fellowship with His Spirit that is of the essence of eternal life, which alone in any experiences through which He leads us, in Heaven above or in earth below, can put the song into our hearts, "Lord, it is good for us to be here." We

have only to remember that, wherever we are, there is but one transfiguring power—that in any circumstance we can turn *from* the light and walk in our *own* shadow, or we can turn *to* the light and receive *its* brightness—but that in no case can we do more than reflect that which shines upon us when we look into the face of our Father who is in Heaven.

And thus, only when by our own wilfulness we wander into *forbidden* ways, and stand on ground from which we know that God has warned us off, can we say with certainty, Lord, it is *not* good for us to be here. Everywhere else, whether we know it or not, the Divine hand has placed us, and for a merciful issue. Long may we struggle against Him and close our eyes to *His* purpose, pursuing our own; but all the more needful was it that we should pass through this experience to discern its hidden lesson and garner its eternal fruit. It needs only that we turn to Him with the faith of the little child of Christ, not for ourselves alone, but for *all*, that when we call Him Father we say no more than we believe to make it impossible that there should be any position in which the comfort of His Spirit did not overflow the circumstance of His Providence—in which there was not some blessing falling from Him on our life, some grace called out of our hearts—if no other grace, the richest of all, the grace of filial trust, of submissive waiting for light in the midst of darkness.

With these habits of faith, with a heart ever looking to Him to catch some new reflection from His Spirit, we may pass through every way of mortal experience

until we come within the shadow of the dark valley—we may close our eyes on this world, and open them on the next, with one assurance in our souls, one confession on our tongues: “Lord, it is good for us to be here.”

THE END.

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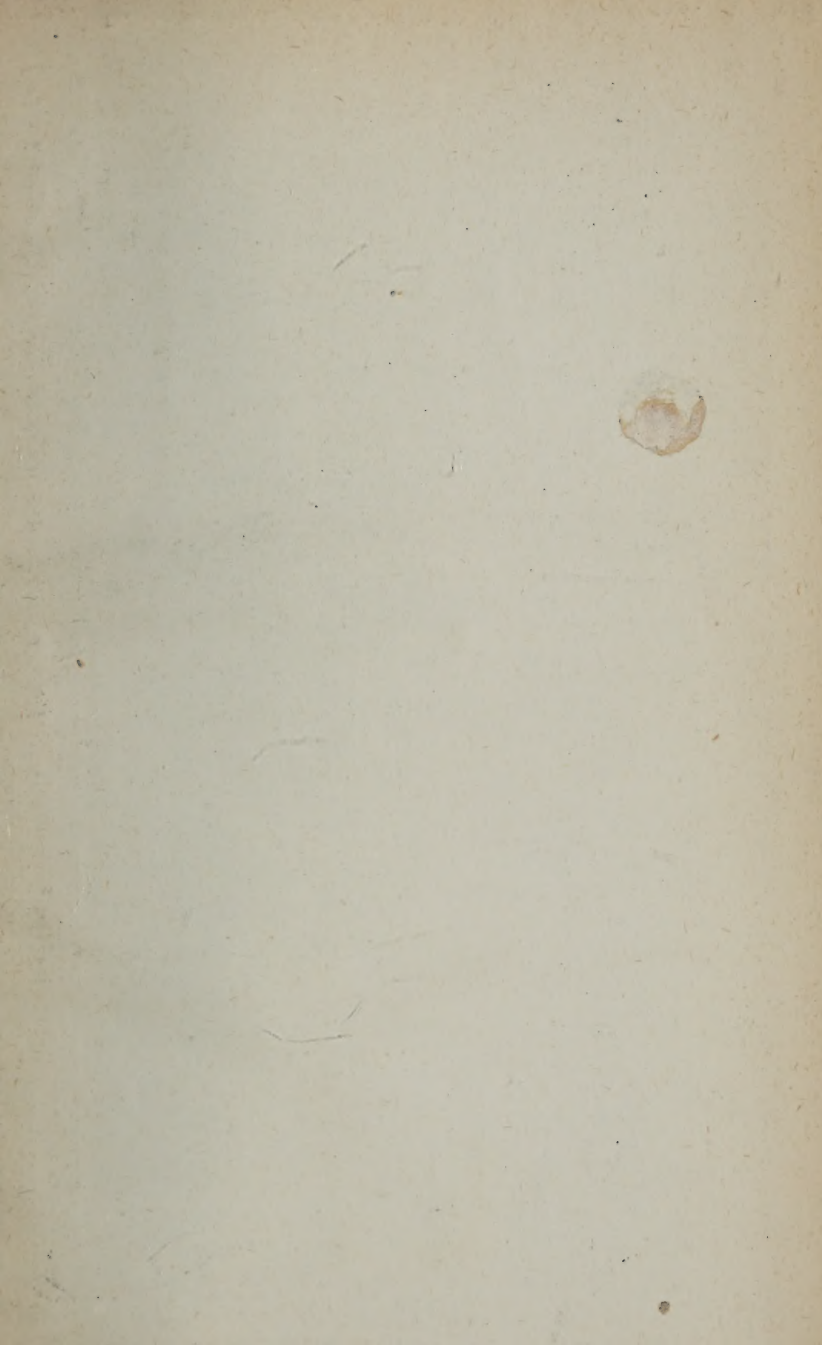
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